



Journey through the Wilderness – Welcoming the Stranger

The 2012 Lenten Bible Study on Immigration

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the world is changing and our communities have new neighbors. We can choose to remain in the wilderness with our questions and fears, or find a way forward as a people of hope.

There are 214 million international migrants in today's world and 750 million internal migrants. People are moving from country to country and even more frequently, within their country often as a result of war, famine, and natural disasters. The search for survival, in its basic expression of water and food, is the day to day reality as millions of people move daily, often at great personal risk and expense, wanting only safety and a better life for themselves and their families.

In the words of Rev. James Perdue, a member of the Iowa Annual Conference serving in the Desert Southwest Conference, *"We are a 'World in Motion.'"* Immigration and migration are very much a part of the history of the United States and The United Methodist Church. In 1920, one in seven persons was a migrant in the United States. In 2011, that number is one in eight; by 2050, when the country is projected to be much more racially and culturally diverse, the number will likely be one in five persons, or 20% of the population born outside of the U.S.

The pattern of migration today is most often:

1. **rural to urban**
2. **underdeveloped to developed country**
3. **south to north** — However, in the U.S. there has been a significant internal migration of African Americans and older adults from northern states to the south and the Sunbelt.

Recent immigration debates have focused primarily on immigrants from Mexico. It is pro-

jected that by 2050 many immigrants will come from sub-Saharan Africa. There is great concern and real fear that often results in the church avoiding study and compassionate, respectful conversation on difficult subjects like immigration and migration. Words like *illegal* and *undocumented* have become part of the language contributing to political debate and decisions, while we remain in the wilderness of distrust and isolation. Bible study offers us a way forward as we seek to stay in love with God and walk closer in the way of Jesus Christ.

Commonly referred to as the Old Testament and the New Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures – often viewed as the roadmap for the Christian Church – have a lot to say about ***“resident aliens,” “Sojourners,” “Strangers,” and foreigners in your midst.*** Exodus 22:21 – *“You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.”* Leviticus 19:34 – *“The alien who resides among you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.”* Hebrews 13:2 – *“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.”*

The United States immigration story, with documented and undocumented immigrants, provides an opportunity for the church to engage in Bible study and Holy conversation. Simple answers do not exist. Any Bible study that brings us closer in our walk with God and out of the wilderness of stereotypes and fear must be rooted in prayer. Politics and security walls cannot be the legacy for a world community in search of the will of God.

May we find our way to the Bible for study, to the altar for prayer, and to holy conversation for understanding our neighbor. What do we who follow Jesus have to say to a “World in Motion?”

I commend this Bible study to you and your church as we journey through the wilderness.

Be encouraged,

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Acknowledgments

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Special thanks to Patty Coon for guiding us in determining outcome, learning targets, objectives, and lesson design.

from the Writers...

Immigration has been going on since Adam and Eve. However, today there are extraordinary numbers of immigrants. Political, social, and economic forces are driving millions of people out of their own homes into the world wide migrant stream. Poverty, hunger, violence, war, the abuse of human rights, religious, and racial prejudice all combine to swell the stream. The primary cause of global migration is the unequal distribution of wealth and its results. The vast majority (up to eighty percent) of migrants are women and children.

Immigration into the United States has been debated since the founding of the republic. The debate has centered on the tensions between economic concerns ("We need workers!") and nativism attitudes ("Keep America the way it was!"). Regardless of the debate, pull and push factors bring in immigrants by the thousands. Economic forces in the United States create the pull factor (agriculture, business, and industry need workers) and the push factor from the country of origin is created by poverty, hunger, war, and violence.

The mass exodus of people from Mexico and other Central American countries to the United States is part of this global reality. Technically, immigration from Mexico began after the Mexican American war. After the United States army invaded Mexico and marched into Mexico City, Mexico was forced into negotiations that required it to cede to the United States the territory made up of the states of California, Nevada, Utah, and parts of Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming, and Texas. What was northwestern Mexico is now southwestern United States.

Mexico is a nation in crisis. Millions live in desperate poverty with an unemployment rate of 40 percent. In the words of one immigrant named Mario, "I left a wife and three kids at home not because I wanted to get rich but because I wanted us to survive. When we got to the point where we did not have enough to buy even necessary things like tortillas, eggs, and sugar, I had to immigrate." A large number of Mexicans cross legally into the United States every day to work, returning at night to their homes in Mexico. But the documents and the border jobs do not begin to meet the demands of the push and pull factors, so every day over 4,000 persons cross deserts, swim rivers or canals, or climb fences along the U.S. Mexican border to enter the U.S. as undocumented immigrants. Only rarely do families migrate together. Usually it is the father who leaves his wife and children behind for a year or longer. "The most painful thing"

said Juan, “is leaving the family behind, especially the children. But we do it in the hopes that some day we will have something in Mexico.”ⁱ

The sufferings of the Mexican immigrant are manifold: physical, emotional, relational, psychological, cultural, and spiritual. Many drown in the canals, many are left without water or direction in the deserts by the coyotes (smugglers who charge a large fee to help immigrants cross the border), and those who make the journey of suffering and arrive find they are in a strange land. They are alienated from home, and church and culture. Most do not know the language and are exhausted trying to find work, and when finding work, are exhausted by the stress of a job that demands they understand a foreign tongue. It is all but impossible to express the deeper feelings that come with experiences of rejection, uselessness, abuse, mistreatment, oppression, and loneliness. Yet they willingly suffer the torments of hell in the desert and in a strange land in order that the people they love may have better lives.

As M. Daniel Carroll R. notes in his book *Christians at the Border*, Christian faith is a vital part of the life of the millions of immigrants who have entered the U.S. The numbers of persons attending church in areas where immigrants settle has been growing rapidly. Masses in Catholic churches are crowded with recent arrivals, and evangelical and Pentecostal congregations are springing up. Hispanic Catholicism is shaped by communal and celebratory traditions such as the Virgin of Guadalupe and the saints. More than half of Hispanic Catholics identify themselves as charismatic, and Pentecostals make up the majority of Protestant Hispanic churches. These Hispanic congregations serve as networking centers for the new arrivals, the needy, for jobs, and for helping immigrants find ways to deal with legal issues. Having traveled through great sufferings themselves, Christian immigrants seek to care for least of their brothers and sisters who are hungry, thirsty, a stranger in a strange land, naked, sick, and in prison, just as Jesus taught in the story of the Last Judgment: “Just as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did it to me.” (Mt 25:31-40)ⁱⁱ

Daniel G. Groody, director of the Center for Latino Spirituality at the University of Notre Dame and author of *Border of Death, Valley of Life*, writes of the immigrants: “Within their particular stories of hunger, thirst, estrangement, nakedness, sickness and imprisonment we can begin to see the face of a crucified Christ (Matthew 25:31-26:2). In their suffering, the immigrants reveal the hidden mystery of Christ today... Like Jesus, many of these immigrants sacrifice their comfort and risk their lives for the good of others. The journey across the border of death is a very real way of the cross for many immigrants, and the entrance to the United States is an experience of crucifixion. Overall, this journey to the United States resembles Jesus’ own journey to Jerusalem, a land of great promise, but also great suffering.”ⁱⁱⁱ

For the immigrants, as for us, suffering leads to a deeper understanding of spirituality. Although suffering is a universal experience, Jesus teaches that the poor have a special insight into the truth of human life: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God” (Luke 6:20). Through the poor we can begin to see the reality of the presence of God who lives with them on the margins of society.

In Lent we are called to reflect upon Jesus’ journey to the cross and to remember his story of the Last Judgment (Matthew 25: 31-46). And so, as we seek to walk with Jesus through Lent, we recognize we are called to walk with the least of these who are also walking the way of the cross.

Prayer

God, you call us into community with yourself and with one another; you want us to make our homes, our schools, our churches, our towns, and our cities places of justice and co-operation where everyone can flourish, everyone can create, everyone can find a place. We have so much

to do before this happens in the places where we live. Help us, God, to build our lives focusing on your love, mercy, and justice for all. We pray to the One who loves us all. Amen.^{iv}

ⁱDaniel G. Groody, *Border of Death, Valley of Life* (Lanham, MD Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), pp. 16, 17

ⁱⁱM. Daniel Carroll R., *Christians at the Border* (Grand Rapids, MI Baker Academic, 2008)

ⁱⁱⁱGroody, pp. 30-33

^{iv}Rebekah Chevalier, Ed *On Frequent Journeys: Worship Resources on Uprooted People* (Toronto, Ontario, The United Church Publishing House, 1997), p. 91



The Stranger Becomes the Host

Outcome

Discover together how the Bible stories inform and shape our understanding of immigration.

Learning Target

Introduce participants to the idea the stranger – that is, someone who is different from one's own culture, race, or ethnicity – is capable of offering hospitality to the mainstream culture or mainline denomination.

Success Criteria/Objective

After reading Biblical stories and reflecting on a local church experience, the participant will be able to connect the Emmaus story to the church story to overcome the fear of stepping outside the walls of the church as disciples.

Procedure

Prayer –

O wandering, migrating God, whose spirit blew over the face of the earth at Creation, we ask that your Spirit pour out over us today. We are all on a journey that winds and wanders through daily events, a journey filled with times of sadness and times of wonder. Sometimes along the way, we open our eyes to your presence and are blessed beyond measure, often we find you in the unexpected – the unexpected person, the one who is very different from us.

We ask that you guide our hearts so we might welcome all who we encounter on our journey, that the stranger and the friend be as one. Just as you have welcomed us with your love, may we welcome the stranger. Only when we invite the stranger into our hearts and homes do we fully receive you and your gifts. Amen.ⁱ

A) Introduction

Think/Pair/Share – Think of a time when you were served communion by someone you did not know or who was different. Describe the setting to a partner. Has there ever been a time when you were breaking bread with someone out of the ordinary and it became holy

or sacramental because of the hospitality extended?

Think/Pair/Share is a teaching strategy where participants are first given time to think of their own answer. They then pair up with one other person and share their thoughts with that person. After the pairs share, the teacher can call on a few students to express their thoughts with the rest of the class.

B) Activities

1. Read and reflect on Luke 24: 13-27.

- a. Ask the participants to share their favorite part of this familiar story and explain why it is so important to them.
- b. Even though it is a popular Bible story, it is shrouded with mystery: We only know one of the disciple's names, the two disciples don't recognize Jesus, no one knows for sure where the village of Emmaus is historically located, the two disciples know what has taken place but not the "stranger," and the story is told only in Luke. Ask the participants to reflect on these mysteries.
- c. Here is more information to add to the mystery: Bible scholar Sharon Ringe suggests the unnamed person with Cleopas is his wife. John 19:25 informs us that Mary, the wife of Clopas and the sister of Jesus' mother, Mary, are standing at the foot of the cross, along with Mary Magdalene. *Cleopas is Greek in form, whereas Clopas looks like an adaptation of a Semetic name. Since the experience of immigrants in any age point to just such variation in names when people move from one language context to another, it is therefore not impossible that both Gospels refer to the same early Christian witness. The travelers may represent a missionary couple in the early church.*ⁱⁱ
- d. In the post resurrection story in John, Jesus is recognized on the shore and eats fish with the disciples. In the post resurrection story in Matthew, Jesus meets the disciples on a mountain and they seem to know and recognize him. Why does Jesus come as a stranger to the disciples in this story in Luke? What's Luke's purpose?

Teacher notes – Here are some possible responses:

The stranger opens us up to new possibilities.

There's an intent by Luke to help us understand when we ignore the stranger, we cut ourselves off from Christ.

A connection to Matthew 25.

We are entertaining angels unaware.

Ask the class other ways we might interpret "strangers."

2. Read the following story of the immersion experience by St. Mark's UMC.

- a. After hearing about the idea in an article read by one of its members, St. Mark's United Methodist Church in Iowa City decided to engage in an outreach experience during Advent. Entitled *A Christmas Carol Conspiracy*, the story described how a Philadelphia suburban church had put together plates of cookies with cash concealed. They planned to take the cookies and cash to some residents of the inner city who were in desperate need, sing carols, and give them the gift of cookies. The names of the families were selected by a pastor who worked with those families and knew the cash gift would help pay bills.

Similarly, the St. Mark's congregation planned to distribute cookie plates to families who lived in the Regency Mobile Home Court just south of Iowa City. It had been in the news recently due to the deplorable living conditions and the high rent. Names of families were secured by the elementary school social worker. Enve-

lopes of cash were placed on the plates and covered with mounds of cookies, then delivered to the mobile homes on a Sunday afternoon by church members who sang carols and extended cheer to the recipients.

At one of the homes, the minister was invited in by the Latina mother while church members gathered at the foot of the steps, ready to sing carols. After she was presented with the cookies, the mother asked the minister to invite everyone inside her mobile home. But when the minister showed her there were twenty people outside, she realized the group would not fit. She then quickly swept up a full box of apples sitting on her table and rushed outside to hand each person an apple. The woman was so overcome by the gift of cookies (at that point, she did not know there was an envelope of cash buried beneath the cookies) that she wanted to express her joy. Every church member was overcome by her hospitality, emotionally moved as she insisted on everyone taking an apple. Perhaps the carolers experienced the same burning heart as the disciples in the Emmaus story. Could this be the same strangely warmed heart John Wesley experienced? The Latina mother became the host that afternoon. Everyone felt as though they had been served by the Christ.

3. Share initial responses to the story.

Church members were surprised by the mother's hospitality. It was unexpected. The church saw themselves as the bearers of gifts. Perhaps contributing to the surprise was the fact that she lived in "those" mobile homes and she was a poor immigrant. What could she offer, really? With a partner, share how you might have felt in this encounter with an immigrant. How might her act help overcome stereotypes? The church never knew for sure, but would it have made a difference if she was undocumented?

4. Compare and contrast the St. Mark's experience with the Emmaus story.

- a. Ask the participants to reflect on this mobile home court encounter, which took place during Advent, as a resurrection story. How is it similar or different to the Emmaus post resurrection story? Connect all of this to Lent.
- b. What fears does a church need to overcome in order to encounter the stranger? Why do we fear? Can you think of scriptural references used during Advent, Lent, and Easter where the message is "Do Not Fear?"

C) Closure

1. What can you do to encourage your church to place itself where it might encounter the stranger in an effort to receive and give hospitality? Do you have faith God will be present?
2. Would your church be willing to try "A Christmas Carol Conspiracy?"
3. In light of the Iowa Conference Leadership Development Team's focus on "new places for new people," what could the church do to build upon this encounter and continue a relationship with the apple giving madre?

Materials Needed for this Lesson

Bible

Church story of the encounter

ⁱRebekah Chevalier, Ed *On Frequent Journeys: Worship Resources on Uprooted People* (Toronto, Ontario: The United Church Publishing House, 1997) p. 21

ⁱⁱSharon H. Ringe, *Luke* (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995) pp. 286-287



Who is My Neighbor?

Outcome

Discover together how the Bible stories inform and shape our understanding of immigration.

Learning Target

Introduce the participants to an understanding of interpreting the Good Samaritan parable in relation to immigration.

Success Criteria/Objective

The participants will be able to understand immigration through the lens of the Good Samaritan parable.

Procedure

Prayer –

Call No One Stranger;

You first saw them by the roadside
standing at the crossroads, waiting . . .

Listening . . . watching

They walked in silence, small bundles on their backs

Clutching other bits in their hands.

Fear on the faces of those women, men and children.

Frightened by the past, fearful of the future

Will no one understand their pain?

Will anyone open a door to receive them?

Look again and you will see

Familiar people

mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, grandparents.

Listen and you will hear

familiar sounds . . .

talking, crying, laughing.

Understand and you will know

the stuff of which your dreams are made . . .

love and laughter, security and safety, peace and prosperity . . .

are their dreams too.

That which is joy to every human heart is not alien to theirs

The peace you long for is that same peace they strive for.

We stand together as one . . .

drawing warmth from the same sun and life from the same earth.

And though we travel on different roads

We're part of one God, one Earth, one Universe . . .

There are no strangers.

Tears shed in compassion . . .

Songs of love and dreams of peace make us all one.

Recognize your family in the stranger

Open your door, invite them in to sit at your table and share your bread.

Call no one stranger whose roots are kin to your own . . .

whose lives all spring from the

One Great Fountain of Life!ⁱ

A) Introduction

Think/Pair/Share – After giving a brief summary of the Good Samaritan parable, ask the participants to pair up and share with whom they identify in the story of the Good Samaritan. (Refer back to lesson one concerning this teaching strategy.)

B) Activities

1. Read Luke 10: 25-38.
2. Being honest with ourselves, we realize there are times we act like the Good Samaritan and times we do not. Reflect on the following:
What is going on in your head and heart when you do stop to help someone?
What is going on in your head and heart when you do not stop to help?

Why are we inconsistent in our behavior?

What prevents us from stopping every time?

3. Assume the person who was robbed and beaten in the parable is an immigrant and perhaps undocumented.

Is there anything that would prevent you from stopping to help in this scenario?

What part does the victim being someone different than yourself play in whether you would help?

4. Assume the Good Samaritan is an immigrant.

The first hearers of this parable would have been shocked to hear a Samaritan stopped to help. The Samaritans knew the Torah just like the Levite and the priest—*Love your neighbor as yourself* (Leviticus 19:18). They were Jews but thought the center of worship should be in Samaria and not Jerusalem, creating angst between the two groups.

What prejudices might exist that would prevent church members from seeing the immigrant as the Good Samaritan?

5. Read the following summation from several news outlets of an event that took place in New Mexico in the past year, then discuss the questions:

Antonio Diaz Chacon, 23, of Albuquerque, New Mexico, chased down a suspected child abductor and saved a six year old girl from being abducted. He witnessed the driver of a van kidnapping the little girl. Antonio jumped into his car and ran the van down, rescuing the little girl.

Antonio later revealed he is married to a United States citizen, but he is in the country illegally and has abandoned attempts to get legal residency because the process is difficult and expensive.

The mayor of Albuquerque declared Antonio a hero.

Do you see a relationship between this story and the Good Samaritan parable? Explain.

Do you think people will act differently toward Antonio, the illegal immigrant, because he saved the little girl? Why or why not?

Why does Antonio have to be a hero for us to see him differently?

Will his act of courage influence people to be Good Samaritans? Why or why not?

C) Closure

1. Discuss the following:

As Christians, how do we reconcile immigration policies with a parable like the Good Samaritan?

The new United Methodist position on immigration was approved at the 2008 General Conference and added to our Social Principles. A copy of that resolution is at the end of this lesson. Read it and discuss how you see the Good Samaritan story impacting the UM position.

Explain how the UM position is or is not in line with your personal beliefs on immigration.

How do you see the UM position impacting government policies?

2. Would your church be willing to re-tell the Good Samaritan parable using immigrants as either the Good Samaritan or the victim?
3. How can we respond to Jesus' command at the end of the parable to "Go and do likewise?"
4. What ways can your church get involved?

Justice For Our Neighbors (JFON) – contact Mary Ellen Barber at Las Americas, Des

Moines

English as a Learned Language (ELL) classes – contact Wendy Vasquez at Las Americas, Des Moines

Rev. Barb Dinnen is the pastor at Las Americas (515.280.8426)

5. Perhaps the contacts mentioned above can help your church consider these ministries as ways to enter into “new places for new ministries.” The Appendix also explains ways congregations can become immigrant welcoming congregations.

Materials Needed for this Lesson

Bible

United Methodist position on immigration

Call for Comprehensive Immigration Reform (#5081, 2008 BOR)

When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.

—Leviticus 19:33-34, NIV

Background:

As followers of Christ we are called to love the stranger in our midst because we were once strangers in a foreign land. The stranger in the midst at one time or another has been your own family member.

In 1996 the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRAIRA) went into effect. This immigration law severely restricted the opportunities of immigrants in the United States to reunite with their families, to obtain permission to work legally, and to avoid being exploited by unscrupulous employers and employment practices. It restricted the opportunities for the elderly to obtain needed social services and for children to obtain an education at a reasonable cost. The IIRAIRA also strengthened border security with the idea of reducing the numbers of people who enter this country every year without permission in search of opportunities to earn wages with which they can support their families back home. The law has not worked. The current immigration system is broken.

Approximately 850,000 immigrants enter the United States without permission every year. America benefits and prospers as a result of their labor; yet denies many of them basic rights like fair wages, health benefits, the opportunity to be with their families, and social services.

We are living in a time of persecution and oppression due to ignorance and fear. There is frustration on all sides about the state of our immigration laws. We must work to channel that frustration into advocacy for the passage of a comprehensive immigration reform bill.

Fear, ignorance, and debate over immigration has generated dangerous racial dynamics that have led to racial profiling and intolerance toward Latino/Hispanic Cultures, an increase in the English-only language movements, and racism. The United Methodist Church has historically stood against racism, cultural prejudice, and other forms of intolerance. On the contrary, we as a church have affirmed and celebrated God’s diverse human creation.

As Christians and United Methodists we are called to love the stranger in our midst and to treat that stranger as we would our own family. We must be a church that welcomes the foreigners into our cities, our towns, our neighborhoods, our churches, our homes. We must keep ourselves open to the opportunity and blessing of entertaining angels unawares. If we are to truly live out our mandate of having open hearts, open minds, open doors, we must work to

ensure the just treatment of the foreigners living among us.

Therefore, be it resolved, that the 2008 General Conference of The United Methodist Church assert that immigrants are children of God made in God's image, affirm the labor and struggle of the undocumented worker, and assert that immigrant children deserve to be educated and provided with basic social services.

Be it further resolved, that The United Methodist Church stand against all forms of oppression and prejudices, and will work through its general agencies, especially the General Commission on Religion and Race and the General Board of Church and Society, to resist racism, intolerance, and prejudice in the context of the immigration debate.

Be it further resolved, that the General Conference urge all the local congregations to oppose unjust local and state ordinances that seek to deprive undocumented persons of basic social services including the access to adequate housing and protection under the law.

Be it further resolved, that the 2008 General Conference join with M.A.R.C.H.A. (Methodists Associated to Represent the Cause of Hispanic/Latino Americans) and urge the United States Congress to pass comprehensive immigration reform that makes family unity, students being able to get an education at an affordable rate, fair and just treatment of laborers, and a reasonable path towards citizenship a priority.

Be it further resolved, that the Council of Bishops be asked to be sensitive to the immigration situation as it is important not only to demand this of the United States Government, but that they also improve policies inside the church that reflect this sensitivity on immigration.

Be it further resolved, that the 2008 General Conference send a copy of this resolution and a letter to the President of the United States and the United States Congress urging them to work towards the passage of a fair and just comprehensive immigration bill.

Finally, be it resolved, that the 2008 General Conference of The United Methodist Church request the Council of Bishops to urgently establish a Plan of Action of Advocacy and Welcoming the Sojourner to enable their annual conferences to immediately respond to the needs and challenges of the Hispanic/Latino immigrant population, and all immigrant populations in the community, by creating opportunities of service and equipping local churches to effectively respond in their ministry.ⁱⁱ

ADOPTED 2008

See Social Principles, ¶162 H, ¶163 F, ¶164 B

ⁱRebekah Chevalier, Ed *On Frequent Journeys: Worship Resources on Uprooted People* (Toronto, Ontario: The United Church Publishing House, 1997) p. 119

ⁱⁱ*The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church* (Nashville, Tennessee: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2008) ¶5081, p.701



Wisdom of the Marginalized

Outcome

Discover together how the Bible stories inform and shape our understanding of immigration.

Learning Target

Introduce participants to the idea of recognizing and appreciating the wisdom of the marginalized through biblical interpretation and personal narrative.

Success Criteria/Objective

After reading biblical stories and reflecting on personal narratives, the participant will be able to connect scripture and experience and apply it to current immigration issues.

Procedure

Prayer —

Strangers Before God;

In Jesus the Christ, who was made a stranger by his own people, God has reached out to those far off and identified with them. Before God, we are all strangers who lack status and recognition, but through Christ we are no longer aliens and strangers, but Citizens of God's commonwealth and members of God's household.

Our new identity as children of God is given to us without merit, as a pure gift of God's grace. We will keep this identity only as long as we share it with others, especially with those who have lost the right to a recognized identity, for in them we encounter Christ the stranger. He meets us in unexpected places and under the most unlikely disguises, seeking recognition and response. We shall know only when we are fully known, when we shall see him in full clarity.

This is the message of the parable of the Last Judgment, which allows us to take a look at who we truly are from the perspective of God. Therefore, it is an urgent invitation to the churches to rediscover their identity as church of the stranger. May God open our eyes that we may see and give us courage to do what is right.ⁱ

A) Introduction

Think/Pair/Share – Ask each participant to think of a time when they learned something from an unexpected source. Perhaps a child said something very interesting or wisdom was shared by a homeless person. Pair up with another person and share your experience. If you have not had this experience, imagine what you might feel or how you might act.

B) Activities

1. Review the Biblical Canaanite problem:
 - a. Canaan is cursed by Noah and destined for slavery – Genesis 9:25 and 27.
 - b. The land of Canaan is what is promised the Hebrew people in Exodus 3:8.
 - c. Canaanites were politically, economically, and religiously oppressed people because of Israel's occupation.
2. Read Matthew 15:21-28 and discuss the following:
 - a. Identify and discuss inappropriate behaviors of that time period that the Canaanite woman exhibited – consider ethnic, gender, religious, political, and economic factors.

Thoughts to consider:

Gender – It was inappropriate for a woman to speak loudly like this to an important man during the day and in public. Notice in Mark 5:22, when Jairus, a leader of the synagogue, approaches Jesus to heal his daughter; there is no commotion like with the Canaanite woman.

Economic – She is by herself. She is not introduced in relation to a husband, brother, or father. Is she a widow, an orphan, never married, or alienated from her family for some reason? Where does she receive financial support?

Ethnic – As a Canaanite, she's a second class citizen. She is held in less regard than others due to the curse. She is not of equal worth such as Native Americans, African Americans, and immigrants in the history of the United States.

Religious – She is a Gentile. Jesus states in Matthew 10:5 that his mission is to the lost sheep of Israel.
 - b. Concern for her daughter drives the Canaanite woman. Can you think of a time when your emotional response to caring for your child's needs caused you to act in a way that was way different from your normal response? For instance, raising your voice at your child's principal, calling the college counselor and demanding action on behalf of your college freshman, or getting belligerent with the emergency room desk nurse who wants you to fill out forms when your child is in the emergency room.
 - c. Ask participants what surprised them about the way Jesus acted initially and then later. What happened to him that changed his mind about his "call" to tend only to the lost sheep of Israel? What surprised you about the woman?
 - d. Reflect on this quote by Warren Carter in *Matthew and the Margins*, page 324: "The unnamed Canaanite woman's persistence in the face of Jesus' obstructions, her challenge to ethnic, gender, religious, political, and economic barriers and her reliance upon his power and her recognition of his authority demonstrates her faith."ⁱⁱ
3. Read the following mission trip story:

Several members of the Iowa Conference staff, laity, and pastors traveled on a work mission to southern Mexico a few years ago. Their task was to prepare and cement the floor of a parsonage. Because the gate to the compound, which housed

the parsonage, was too small for the cement mixer, they had to mix the cement, sand, rocks, and water by hand. Carrying the cement by bucket and wheelbarrow proved to be a physical challenge in the high altitude. The job took longer than planned. Thank goodness there were villagers who hoisted five gallons of cement onto their shoulders and pushed cement filled wheelbarrows to assist the team.

While the group worked every day, three little girls between the ages of five and eight watched them labor in the high altitude. At the end of the week, the girls were joined by their father. The volunteers greeted the parent and told him how much they enjoyed the presence of his daughters. They asked what he did for a living and he said he traveled to a northern U.S. state to work in a Wal-Mart. When asked him why he took such a risk, he replied that he could stay in Mexico and make \$5.00 a day or cross the border and make \$8.00 an hour at Wal-Mart. He looked at the group and at his three daughters and then asked, "What would you do if these were your children?"

His question and story connected with the Iowa group. They no longer thought of him as an illegal alien or an undocumented worker; rather, he was a father, just like some of the parents in the group, wanting to help his children flourish. Similar to the Canaanite woman, the father was seeking wellness for his children. He was "outside" the historical and economic norm, yet his concern for his children was inclusive in the worldly human expectations for a parent and his/her children.

a. Share initial responses to the story.

b. In the large group, discuss the following questions:

How is the father like the Canaanite woman?

Do you think the father in the story should cross the border into the United States to find work? Why or why not?

How does your faith inform you about his condition and his migration?

4. Share the following NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) information with the group:

Implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) began on January 1, 1994. This agreement will remove most barriers to trade and investment among the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

Under the NAFTA, all non-tariff barriers to agricultural trade between the United States and Mexico were eliminated. In addition, many tariffs were eliminated immediately, with others being phased out over periods of 5 to 15 years. This allowed for an orderly adjustment to free trade with Mexico, with full implementation beginning January 1, 2008.

The agricultural provisions of the U.S.-Canada Free Trade Agreement, in effect since 1989, were incorporated into the NAFTA. Under these provisions, all tariffs affecting agricultural trade between the United States and Canada, with a few exceptions for items covered by tariff-rate quotas, were removed by January 1, 1998.

Mexico and Canada reached a separate bilateral NAFTA agreement on market access for agricultural products. The Mexican-Canadian agreement eliminated most tariffs either immediately or over 5, 10, or 15 years. Tariffs between the two countries affecting trade in dairy, poultry, eggs, and sugar are maintained.ⁱⁱⁱ

NAFTA influence on Mexican economy

Some 2 million Mexicans have been forced out of agriculture. These people are from areas with no other job options. They can starve or they can migrate.

NAFTA's service-sector rules allowed big firms like Wal-Mart to enter the Mexican

market thus far putting out of business more than 28,000 locally-based small manufacturing firms.

Wages along the Mexican border have actually been driven down by about 25% since NAFTA. Border wages typically run 60 cents to \$1 an hour.^{iv}

- a. Discuss how this policy might impact the young father's decision to seek work in the United States.
 - b. Individually, determine how this government policy aligns with your interpretation of the teachings of the gospel. Share your thoughts with a partner. Discuss partner conversations with the large group.
5. Some people wonder why immigrants don't wait in line and come through the proper channels. The following statistics from Gary Walter, one of the Justice For Our Neighbor attorneys in Iowa, might be helpful in understanding the wait time.

Family based immigration to the U.S. is limited to 226,000 family members each year.

As of November 1, 2010, 4,683,393 family members worldwide were waiting for one of the 226,000 visas to come to the United States to be with family members. An additional restriction is that only 7% of these visas can be used by any one single country. Mexico currently has 1,181,896 family members waiting for the 7% allotment, which is 18,600 visas. Because of these limitations, the wait period can be very long, from 5-20 years. For example, as of March 2011, the U.S. government is allowing Mexican children over 21 (who have a family connection to a U.S. citizen) to apply for a visa if their initial paperwork was filed before February 1, 1993.

There are also costs involved in the process. For instance, if a wife wants to obtain a visa for her spouse and has to return to their home country to file, the costs are \$420.00 for the I-130 initial relative petition, \$88.00 for the affidavit support fee, \$404.00 for the immigration visa = \$912.00. These costs do not include obtaining a passport, travel costs, and the cost of staying abroad while the case is pending.

If they can file without leaving the country, the costs are \$420.00 for the initial relative petition, \$985.00 for the adjustment application, and \$85.00 for biometrics = \$1490.00.

Ask participants to discuss how the wait time and costs might discourage someone from waiting in line.

6. Revisit the Matthew passage.
- a. Ask participants to share their ideas as to why Jesus ultimately heals the Canaanite woman's daughter.

Consider the following: Jesus answers her, *O Woman, great is your faith!* He witnesses her faith in her actions. Faith is a verb. James 2: 14-17 reminds us: *So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.* The woman meddles by shouting and engaging because she has evidently heard that Jesus is the traveling Mayo Clinic.

Does your discipleship include faith as action? Share with others how faith is a verb in your spiritual journey. How long can we remain silent when there is oppression?

7. Connect the Canaanite woman's wisdom to the Great Commission.
- a. Read the great commission from Matthew 28: 19 (Jesus commissions the eleven to make disciples of all nations).
 - b. Relate the Canaanite woman's actions and response to Jesus to the Matthew 28:19 passage.

Note: Jesus includes all nations in the Great Commission.

C) Closure

Is your church's response to the immigration issue more like the initial response of Jesus and the disciples – that is, to ignore it and send it away – or is it to engage with and learn from the immigrant? Explain.

If indeed the marginalized Canaanite woman did influence Jesus and his Great Commission, how can the church recognize the wisdom and gifts of the immigrant today and welcome them as part of the body of Christ to helping make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world?

How can connecting the Canaanite woman to influencing Jesus and the Great Commission help the Church justify “new places for new people?”

Please refer to the Appendix for steps on becoming a welcoming congregation for immigrants.

Materials Needed for this Lesson

Historical overview of the Canaanites

Scripture references – Matthew 15:21-28 and Matthew 28:19

Bible

Quote (2d)

Story of mission trip to Mexico

NAFTA information

ⁱRebekah Chevalier, Ed *On Frequent Journeys: Worship Resources on Uprooted People*, (Toronto, Ontario The United Church Publishing House, 1997) p. 111

ⁱⁱWarren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins* (Maryknoll, NY Orbis Books, 2001) pp. 324-325

ⁱⁱⁱUnited States Department of Agriculture Website – www.fas.usda.gov/itp/policy/nafta/nafta.asp, *A Brief History of NAFTA*, Time US Website – www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8559,1868997,00.html

^{iv}*Myths and Facts About the Cost of Immigration in the USA* (Greensboro, North Carolina FaithAction International House, 2008) Impact of NAFTA on the Mexican Farmer



David and Uriah

Outcome

Discover together how the Bible stories inform and shape our understanding of immigration.

Learning Target

Introduce participants to the vulnerability of immigrants living in a foreign land.

Success Criteria/Objective

After reading the biblical story of David and Bathsheba, the participants will gain a new understanding of the story by focusing on Uriah, the Hittite, and connecting his story to the present day immigrant story.

Procedure

Prayer –

You Have Come from Afar –

You have come from afar
and waited long and are wearied:
Let us sit side by side
sharing the same bread
drawn from the same source
to quiet the same hunger
that makes us weak.
Then standing together
let us share the same spirit,
the same thoughts
that once again draw us together
in friendship and unity and peace.ⁱ

A) Introduction

Think/Pair/Share – Ask the participants to think about their own heritage. From what coun-

try did your family originate? How has it impacted your life? Select a partner and share your thoughts.

B) Activities

1. Review the history of the Hittites.

We know from Genesis 10:15 (Heth), the Hittites were a part of Canaan prior to Israel invading the land. Therefore, they were not part of the tribes of Israel. They are portrayed in II Kings 7:6 as having a king and an army, as the Arameans believed the Israelites had hired them and Egypt to fight against the Arameans. At this point in II Samuel, Uriah does not have Israel as a help in this story. He does not have a tribal identity.

2. Read II Samuel 11:1-27.

3. Select a class member to read the following summary:

In the spring, when all good kings and empires go to war, David sends his soldiers to the countryside to conquer while he, the king, stays in the city. On a nice spring evening, David is enjoying the air and notices a pretty woman. He sends his men out to find out about her. The news: she's Uriah the Hittite's wife. Uriah was an immigrant and, as such, David knew he had nothing to worry about. He invited her – or was it a command? – to visit. Could a young lady turn down an invitation from the king?

Upon learning Bathsheba had become pregnant during her visit to the king's chambers, David plots to cover up his liaison with her. He brings Uriah, the honorable soldier, back from the front, asks him to report on the war and then sends him home to sleep with his wife. "Go to your house and wash your feet" is what one would do before sleeping with one's wife. (Washing one's feet in this sentence is a euphemism for sexual intercourse.) When David learns that Uriah, the honorable soldier, slept outside and did not go home to his wife, David demands to know why. Uriah says he could not possibly enjoy the comforts of home – food, wine, sex – while his commander and fellow soldiers were sleeping in tents on the front-lines. The next night David invites Uriah to eat and drink (drink a lot) with him thinking Uriah, in his drunken state, would go home to sleep with his wife. But again, Uriah sleeps on a mat with the other servants.

David sends for Joab, the commander of Uriah, and tells him Uriah should be sent to the front of the lines; Joab complies, and Uriah dies. Then Bathsheba came to live at David's house and bears him a son, who later dies.

4. Reflect on the passage.

How interesting that David first sent messengers to investigate Bathsheba. Realizing Bathsheba is a Jew, because of her name and her father's, if she had been the wife of a Jew or belonged to a Jew, would he have sent for her? As a wife of an immigrant she was more accessible to David, an immigrant could never challenge the king. As a woman and a wife of an immigrant, could Bathsheba deny David? What would have happened to her and her husband? It happens today when female workers tolerate sexual harassment and abuse because they fear for their jobs. Without jobs their husbands and their children will suffer.

We know nothing about Uriah's feelings for his old country or his new one except he strived with all his heart to be an honorable soldier. He followed all of the laws, customs, and expectations of his new country and his fellow soldiers. Uriah adhered to them better than the King of Israel, David. Yet, he would never be of the

same status because he was not of the tribes of Israel. Following the laws and commands of the country in power eventually caused his death. Ironically, Uriah's name means "God's light."

5. Have the class discuss the following questions:

Why could David take Uriah's wife?

Teacher notes – David is King and his power over a woman is revealed by the Hebrew text which reads: David sent and took and lay with her. The NIV and NRSV soften the text by saying David sent messengers to get her.

Would David have done the same if she had married an Israelite?

Why didn't Uriah go home to be with his wife?

How are today's immigrants taken advantage of because of their immigrant status?

6. Use two people from your class to read the following telephone conversation between a mother and her undocumented child. This was a dialogue sermon preached at Las Americas/Trinity UMC in Des Moines. The writer of the sermon is the undocumented child in the story. Because he was ornery as a child, he was sent to the U.S. at the age of 14. And because of his small yet wiry build, he was recruited by the coyotes (those who lead people across the border for large sums of money). Eventually he was left in a house by himself by the coyotes and was told to either get some money from his brother or die in the house. Since then, he has graduated from the University of Northern Iowa and is currently attending a United Methodist seminary.

MOTHER: Child! When are you coming home? You've been away for many years.

UNDOCUMENTED CHILD: Soon, Mother! I am trying to finish seminary and save enough money to go see you. If I go now, I won't be able to come back to the U.S.

MOTHER: What are you afraid of?

UC: I've been away for so long. Remember, I've been away for nine years. I am afraid that I don't remember the taste of your delicious food. I am afraid I have forgotten the feeling of your hugs and kisses. I am afraid I cannot remember your beautiful smile.

MOTHER: I look at the pictures of when you were a baby, small and innocent. I don't know how you look now! I still have that chair on which you sat for hours watching cartoons. I used to yell at you to turn off the TV. Now I stare at that chair for hours, wishing you were here watching cartoons.

UC: Mother! I don't know who I am anymore. The people in this country tell me that I don't belong. People from my home country judge me because I like peanut butter and jelly.

MOTHER: Child, you remind me of the Bible story about Uriah, the Hittite. He was an immigrant like you. He was from the land of the Hittites. He was living in Jerusalem, the capital of those who had conquered his country. He was never really accepted as an Israelite but in fact he was more of an Israelite than King David because he followed all the laws of Moses. Uriah was married to Bathsheba, and David wanted her for himself so he stole her, and in order to cover his action ordered Uriah to be assassinated in battle.

UC: Mother! I am trying to do what's right. They exploit me because I don't have a voice. The system steals my labor and my dreams. And like David, they would rather see me die in battle and steal what's mine.

MOTHER: Child, many of your sisters and brothers have died in battle. Many Uriahs have died and what little they had was taken from them. My sons and daughters who are there, like Uriah, are as U.S. citizens as anyone can be.

UC: Mother. What should I do? I am not from here and I am not from there. I am lost in limbo. I cannot go back to you because this is my new home. I feel uncomfortable here because they call me “illegal.”

MOTHER: Illegal!!? What crime did you commit? Have you killed somebody or stolen or hurt others?

UC: No! They call me “illegal” because I dare to dream big, because I want a better future for you and the rest of our family, because I work hard and don’t complain.

MOTHER: Why are you still there? Why don’t you come home?

UC: Because, Mother, in some places back home they want to kill me because I stood up against oppression. In other places, I could not manage to support my family. Also, I grew up here, my English is better than my Spanish native tongue.

MOTHER: Child. When will this end? When am I going to see you, to hug you, and kiss you? When will I cook your favorite food? Will you come back as a child and sit at that chair and watch cartoons? I promise I will not yell at you.

UC: Mother, I don’t know. The “Davids” of this world will steal from us and kill us because we are doing the right thing. I may see you when I get deported. Poor, naked, and ashamed I will come knocking on your door. Please, Mother, when that happens let me in because I am lost in limbo.

MOTHER: My child, I will always love you. Injustice is devouring my children everywhere. Who will go and rescue the children from the demon of injustice?

7. Discuss the following questions:

- a. Why did the mother compare her son’s situation to Uriah’s?
- b. Who is the son referring to when he speaks of the “Davids” of this world?
- c. Share your feelings about the son being upset with the system when he’s in the country as an undocumented. Why should he be upset when he is here “illegally?”
- d. The son says he does not have a voice due to exploitation. What do you think he is referring to and do you agree or disagree? What is the “system” he refers to that steals his labor and dreams?
- e. Since the U.S. relies on so many undocumented workers, how do you feel about a program where they are allowed to work here and get into a path to citizenship?

C) Closure

1. How do you think your church would react hearing this telephone conversation as a sermon some Sunday morning?
2. How do the stories of Uriah and the undocumented child connect to Lent?

At the end of the dialogue sermon, the pastor used the following benediction to end the service: The Children of God (everyone stand up and say): We will cast this demon of injustice out of the system in the name of God, in the name of love, in the name of Jesus! AMEN.

Materials Needed for this Lesson

Bible

History of Hittites

Telephone conversation

ⁱRebekah Chevalier, Ed *On Frequent Journeys: Worship Resources on Uprooted People* (Toronto, Ontario The United Church Publishing House, 1997) p. 93



God Works Outside of Human Barriers

Outcome

Discover together how the Bible stories inform and shape our understanding of immigration.

Learning Target

Introduce participants to the concept of God ignoring the rituals and dogmas of the organized religion, such as the purity codes, to bring about a new awakening of God's kingdom.

Success Criteria/Objective

After reading the biblical story of Ruth and reflecting on Manuel's story, the participant will be able to connect the two stories and recognize their similarity to current immigration issues.

Procedure

Prayerful Thought –

Receiving the Stranger

We must genuinely receive the stranger. In theological terms, we must incorporate their lives into ours so that we can know the unity which we share as children of God. What these encounters invariably teach us is the common humanity which we share. Once ethnic, racial and cultural differences are peeled away, the possibility of experiencing our common humanity emerges. Therefore, tolerating the stranger is not enough. Accepting the stranger as a sister or brother is what is required. Only then are we blessed. Only then is their spirit and ours united.

A) Introduction

Think/Pair/Share – Think of or imagine a situation in your own family/a family you know where a member of the family dated or married someone from another race, culture, or class (for example: the mayor's daughter married a boy from "across the tracks"). With another person, share your recollections of how both families were affected by this. What do you remember were some barriers to be crossed? If applicable, how did healing unfold?

B) Activities

1. Review the history of the Moabites.
 - a. Moab is the son of Lot as a result of an incestuous relationship between Lot and his eldest daughter (Genesis 19:30-38). In Leviticus 18:9, the faithful are told to not uncover the nakedness of their father's daughter, causing a defilement.
 - b. Moabites are excluded from the assembly in Deuteronomy 23:3-6.
 - c. In the post-exilic text of Nehemiah, Nehemiah (13:23-29) gets angry at the Jewish men who have married Moabite women because their children no longer know the language of Judah.
2. Read Ruth 1:1-22.
 - a. Ask participants how they feel about Nehemiah's remarks and actions in Nehemiah 13:25. Some scholars believe the book of Ruth is a response to Nehemiah's rage. Ask participants why they think scholars might make this leap.
 - b. Based upon the previous readings and discussions, ask participants if they see a storm brewing because the Jewish couple, Naomi and Elimelech, have sons who have married Moabite women. Some scholars believe Naomi and Elimelech are also defiled because their sons married Moabite women.
3. Read the following story and reflect on the discussion questions.

Manuel and Ena left their home country, El Salvador, in the middle of the night in early May of 1989. They did not tell anyone in the village they were going, as they did not want to arouse suspicion or attract attention. Ena's mother helped them pay the coyote, the man who would lead the group to the U.S. Using a coyote was the only way to get out of their war-torn country.

The mother-in-law wanted her daughter and her new husband to flee as quickly as they could because she had already lost her husband to the military. She watched the military pull her husband out of the house in his underwear and throw a bag over his head. In the following weeks she would hear of dead people found in several villages. She traveled to those villages to sort through the piles of tortured and mutilated bodies, eventually finding her husband, signs of torture on his body like many others. Manuel's mother-in-law rationalized that the three thousand dollars for the coyote was well spent if it prevented one more family member's death. In 2011 the coyote's pay is closer to \$6,000-\$8,000. Even today many still think it is money well spent to escape the violence and poverty of their home country.

Manuel and Ena's story is like so many. They did whatever they could to make ends meet by working any job and traveling to several states. Fortunately they did not have to compromise themselves to gain Boaz's favor. However, Manuel did have to drink water from standing pools with thirsty pigs. He and his wife's lives were so unstable that at one time they had to share the only space available, a closet, where they fit by lying on their sides. Manuel learned to play the 'immigration game' as he calls it, when he arrived later in May of 1989. Each pass of the wheel took them to another level of uncertainty and frustration.

Their journey to becoming citizens began when he and Ena received temporary permanent status in 1990. They applied again in 1991 and once again received the TPS. In 1993 they received a letter telling them they were on deportation status. Then in 1994 they received a letter informing them that all El Salvadorians who arrived before September 30, 1990, could apply for asylum, which they did, and were asylum applicants from 1995-2000. In 1999, they were informed they could apply for

a permanent residence card, which they received in 2001. After a five-year wait, Manuel applied to become a citizen, which occurred in 2007.

He had won the prize, the right to remain in the U.S. forever. Manuel made this country his home country, but he never forgets to tell his children they are Salvadorans by blood, proudly reminding his children they are also 'indigenos' – Indians. Indians in El Salvador hold the same social status as the Moabites – pretty far down on the socio-economic ladder. He returns to the country of his birth with others from his church and community to share the love of God and the compassion of Jesus. His church and community group will return again in 2012 for their third trip. Manuel and Ena have become leaders in their Iowa United Methodist church.

- a. Reflect on Manuel's and his wife's journey to the U.S. Was it justified? Are you sympathetic to their reasons for leaving? What would you have done in his situation? What would it be like to leave your village without saying goodbye?
4. Revisit the story of Ruth. Can anything good come from Moab?
 - a. In the conclusion of the Ruth story, Ruth marries the Jewish farmer and business man, Boaz (a mixed marriage). She has a son Obed, who becomes the father of Jesse, who is the father of David.
 - b. Do you find it interesting that a Moabite woman, a descendant of Moab who is defiled according to God's law in Leviticus, is used by God to be the great grandmother of King David?
 - c. Read the genealogy in Matthew chapter one. Ruth is mentioned as one of Jesus ancestors, along with Tamar, who plays the part of a prostitute to trick Judah, her father-in-law, into giving her a child; Rahab, the prostitute who hid the Israelite messengers sent by Joshua; and the wife of Uriah (Bathsheba) who becomes pregnant by David. Ask participants what they think about Jesus being connected to this messiness.
 - d. All of these women could be described as defiled, yet they do what they need to do to survive and are part of God's salvation. Do you know of or have you heard of women like this?
 - e. This story begins with Naomi being bitter. Ruth helps overcome Naomi's bitterness by connecting with Boaz and giving birth. Naomi becomes a good grandmother. Ruth, the immigrant, comes as a blessing. God's love reaches out beyond boundaries.
5. Encourage application to today's world. Can blessings come from Mexico/Nicaragua/Africa?
 - a. Are immigrants today like the Ruth of the Bible? Do you see a similarity between how we treat the immigrant today and the disdain for Ruth the Moabite, even though she was included in God's plan of salvation?
 - b. Connect Manuel's story to Ruth's story. What gifts does he share with Las Americas Comunidad de Fe and Trinity United Methodist Church in Des Moines? How is Manuel a blessing to the church and part of God's salvation?
 - c. Reflect on the following quote by Kathleen Farmer from her commentary on Ruth in The New Interpreter's Bible:

"Reversal is the essence of redemption. Within the story world Naomi is the primary object of redemption. It is Naomi whose life is turned around, whose feelings of bitterness, emptiness and hopelessness are reversed. Ruth's faithfulness is only the instrument God uses to accomplish Naomi's redemption... Redemption is not a reward given to Naomi because of her exemplary behav-

ior. God chooses to redeem those who seem to have done little to deserve redemption. And God chooses to use those who seem unqualified according to human standards of judgment to accomplish God's purposes in the world. The admirability of the 'other' in the story (be they Samaritan or Moabite) should primarily convict us of our own repeated failures to recognize the despised 'other' as an agent of God's redemptive activity in the world.

In fact, the parabolic nature of the narrative makes tenuous every attempt to pin its origins down to one particular setting in the life of Israel. The enduring appeal of Ruth depends precisely upon this non-specificity, which allows the story to function effectively as revelation in our own as well as Israel's eyes. When the kaleidoscope of history spins into our own time, we must consider how people in a country in the process of tightening its immigration laws in order to protect its cultural identity will see or hear themselves reflected in the dynamics of the text. Every new reader is challenged afresh to recognize his or her own present reality mirrored in a narrative that both convicts us of our lack of merit and assures us of God's redemptive inclinations."

C) Closure

1. God does not let barriers get in the way of salvation history. In fact, God seems to have ignored the Leviticus teaching about being defiled by using Ruth the Moabite. What barriers exist in your church/community due to tradition, perceptions, or stereotypes? How will overcoming these barriers help the church engage with the Iowa Conference's focus of "new places for new people?"
2. Would your church be willing to go back and study Ruth again from the immigration perspective? Could you get your pastor to preach from Ruth and connect it to immigration? Who will ask her/him?

Materials Needed for this Lesson

Bible

Historical overview of Moabites

Story of Manuel

ⁱRebekah Chevalier, Ed *On Frequent Journeys: Worship Resources on Uprooted People*, (Toronto, Ontario The United Church Publishing House, 1997) p. 113

ⁱⁱKathleen A. Robertson Farmer, *The Book of Ruth, The New Interpreter's Bible, Vol II* (Nashville, TN Abingdon Press, 1998) pp. 892-3

ⁱⁱⁱ*Ibid.*, p. 896



Out of Egypt

Outcome

Discover together how the Bible stories inform and shape our understanding of immigration.

Learning Target

The learner will connect the Holy Family's exile to Egypt to immigration issues today.

Success Criteria/Objective

The participant will understand how the Holy Family's flight to Egypt is similar to people migrating between countries today.

Procedure

Prayer –

God who travels with the sojourner, we ask that you be with us as we struggle with the questions of our reality. Why do they come here? What do they want? Can't they make their own country safe to live in? Who will take care of them here? Must we care for everyone? Why don't they speak our language? Why don't they mix in with us, but stay apart by themselves?

Open our hearts to the cries of the infants fleeing the 'Herods' of our day. Open our eyes to the brokenness of the world. Open our hearts to all of your children who dream dreams of a new and better life for their own children.

God, you who have given us much, open our hands to welcome the many who are in our midst. Amen.¹

A) Introduction

Think/Pair/Share – Think of a Christmas tradition your family celebrates that is part of another culture. If you do not have one, perhaps you have heard of a friend who uses a Christmas tradition from another culture. With a partner, share your experiences.

B) Activities

1. Read Matthew 1:18-2:18.
2. Discuss the following questions:
 - a. What were the conditions in the story that forced the angel to instruct Joseph and Mary to flee?
 - b. How do you think they felt, leaving their homeland?
 - c. List conditions forcing immigrants to flee today. (Reflect on the previous lesson concerning Manuel and Ena.)
 - d. Share with another participant a time either you, members of your family, or friends were required or forced to move to another area. Example: During the farm crisis of the 1980s some people were forced to move off of the farm to urban areas. What were the conditions and what emotions did people feel?
 - e. Can you connect the loss, fear, and anxiety of Mary and Joseph as well as these same emotions your family or friends may have experienced to present day immigrants? Discuss.
 - f. How do you respond to people who are required to leave their home country because of an oppressive condition, such as hunger or poverty?

Read the following summary of why one woman fled her country.

A woman from a Central American country witnessed her husband being killed in her village. She remarried and was abused by her second husband. She became pregnant after being raped, which occurred in her poor neighborhood in a large city run by gangs. This is when she decided to find sanctuary in the U.S. where her mother was a citizen. The woman felt powerless in her home country.

Do you think she has good cause to migrate?

What would you do in her situation?

Should the United Methodist church get involved in helping persons in these situations?

If you are opposed to someone like this woman migrating without documents, how do you reconcile the biblical message *to welcome the stranger*?

What might prevent this woman from trying to reform her home country?

3. Part of the much loved birth narrative from Matthew (2:1-12) includes the story of the Magi, who, by the way, happen to be visitors (immigrants?) from the East. Why do we tend to ignore the exile story as part of Christmas? It has an angel and dreams (sugar plums?) and Mary and Joseph keep the gift safe. Can you imagine including the Holy Family's exile and migration in your next year's Christmas pageant? Use your imagination. (Incidentally, the woman who migrated due to abuse, mentioned above, ended up in a United Methodist church in Iowa where she and her child played the part of Mary and the baby in the Christmas play.)

C) Closure

1. The Christmas story means so much to church members. It is one time when we are together and everything seems good with the world. Would you encourage your church to look at it from an immigration perspective?
2. This is a Lenten study. How does it connect to Advent/Christmas? Can you connect the two through the trials and suffering of people migrating and Jesus? Refer to Bishop Trimble's introductory comments and the Bible study introduction for insight.

3. Please refer to the Appendix for ways to become a welcoming congregation for immigrants.

Materials Needed for this Lesson

Bible

¹Rebekah Chevalier, Ed *On Frequent Journeys: Worship Resources on Uprooted People* (Toronto, Ontario The United Church Publishing House, 1997)



Becoming an IMMIGRANT WELCOMING CONGREGATION

The response by congregations in serving the daily needs of immigrant communities continues to be necessary. While these services are essential, they will not bring about needed legislative reform to fix the badly broken immigration system. We need reform to provide legal status for undocumented immigrants and to reunify their families. What the current context demands is justice for immigrants. Congregations providing direct services for immigrants witness the brokenness of the current system and are in the best position to advocate for necessary legislative reform. Yet many congregations are not fully engaged in the mission of advocacy, or are frustrated because they simply do not know how to best to engage in advocacy. Our goal with this journey to “Become an Immigrant Welcoming Congregation” is to equip churches to travel from mercy to justice, from service-only to incarnational friendship, from ministering to being transformed alongside of. For each step, we offer suggestions for participation and guidance for how the desire for justice can be a reality.

The journey toward becoming an
IMMIGRANT WELCOMING CONGREGATION
involves five steps:

1. Understand and Articulate Our Faith

Start with our faith. Learn what Scripture says about welcoming immigrants and moving from *mercy* to *justice*.

Goals:

1. Learn about the pervasive theme of hospitality throughout the Bible.
2. Embrace the calling all Christians have to justice ministries.
3. Know what United Methodists say about immigration (Social Principles, Resolutions).
4. Learn the history of migration in the United States and in your community.

Living it out in our Home Congregations:

1. Host a talk by an immigration expert in the field, OR

2. Host a presentation by an organizer or religious leader on the topic of immigration and faith, OR
3. Host an interactive workshop on immigration and faith.

2. Build Incarnational Relationships

Understand the basic root of building a movement for justice for immigrants is incarnational relationships. Depending on your context, this may take many different forms, but getting to know people directly affected by the issue is key.

Goals:

1. Begin to build bridges linking immigrant communities and your congregation by creating a personal connection to the issue; for example, between your congregation and an immigrant youth or family.
2. Learn a missiological model for relationships that are mutual, reciprocal, and egalitarian, not ones that reinforce power differentials or paternalistic or colonialistic tendencies.
3. Map out congregational community and immigrant communities they are serving.

Living it out in our Home Congregations:

1. Participate in local ESOL classes (English for Speakers of Other Languages).
2. Volunteer at a Justice For Our Neighbors or a nearby immigration legal clinic.
3. Share a meal with an immigrant church in your community. Give both congregations the opportunity to be *host* and *guest*.
4. Participate in a ministry working with day laborers.
5. Establish relationships with local schools, listening to their needs and concerns about immigrant children and youth. Find ways for your congregation to become involved in their lives (tutoring, after school programs, etc.).
6. Map out community and determine assets and resources (John McKnight's book).

3. Educate for Transformation

Education that leads to incarnational relationships and engagement is key to bringing about societal transformation.

Goals:

1. Broaden the base of your immigration ministry by including transformational education for your whole congregation.
2. Recruit new members to the movement through educational events.
3. Continue to create personal connections to the issue between your congregation and an immigrant youth or family while including an educational component.
4. Conduct messaging training and practice talking about immigration; prepare for the questions/concerns you might encounter.

Living it out in our Home Congregations:

1. Movie night followed by testimony, OR
2. Share a meal with families affected by the current immigration system, OR
3. Have a panel discussion with immigration leaders, including youth or families, OR
4. Creatively incorporate into worship prayers, sermons, testimonies, and scripture readings in other languages, etc.

4. Prayerful Action

Through worshipful action, we will publicly find ways to be relationally present with our immigrant sisters and brothers.

Goals:

1. Learn how to create a powerful experience for our congregations.
2. Understand societal transformation happens when our faith becomes public.
3. Connect immigration to prayer and action.

Living it out in our Home Congregations:

1. Hold a prayer vigil at your church or other strategic location, taking into account any current local, state, national legislation or events happening around immigration, OR
2. Organize a “Neighbor to Neighbor” visit to meet and establish a relationship with your representatives, OR
3. Host a “Breaking Bread and Barriers” event at your church, OR
4. Locate a court nearby that deals with immigration and witness the court proceedings, OR
5. Join a group in your area and participate in detention visitation, OR
6. Host a letter writing party and prayer vigil for the “Let My People Stay” campaign of the Interfaith Immigration Coalition, which asks for deferred action for particular immigrants. It is also recommended that those who participate in this ministry find ways to involve the rest of the congregation in their experience, either by raising money or signing prayer cards ahead of time, or by reporting back to the congregation about your experience.
7. Consider what you will include in your congregation’s covenant (public action, emergency, response, continued education, and relationships for transformation), and begin drafting this.

5. Affirm Our Covenant

Bless and affirm our commitment to leading our congregations in becoming “Immigrant Welcoming Congregations.” Celebrate our core group of leaders, congregations, and covenants.

Goals:

1. Identify areas for deeper growth, learning, and strategy for both continuing to teach this new learning and translating it into action.
2. Be empowered to be change agents in our communities.
3. Assume a prophetic role in connecting and reconciling: immigrants, dominant culture, and those in places of public power.

Living it out in our Home Congregations:

1. Have the leadership of the congregation speak to the entire congregation, to show immigration is woven into the religious life of the congregation.
2. Create a moment when the congregation makes a sacred commitment to continue to welcome immigrants. This will differ according to each congregation. Many will include a prayer, anointing, and/or covenant.
3. Bless the congregation’s ongoing ministry on this issue.
4. Congregations are invited to display a public symbol to identify your congregation as an “Immigrant Welcoming Congregation” and to sign the Welcoming Covenant.

5. Join Rapid Response Teams or Ecumenical or Interfaith Coalitions (invite one or two people from each congregation), and attend regular meetings to unite with other congregations working on immigration issues in order to continue planning further actions together.

Bill Mefford, Director of Civil and Human Rights for the General Board of Church and Society, was involved in the writing of the “Immigrant Welcoming Congregation” document. If your congregation is interested in following up with this plan, please contact Naomi Sea Young Wittstruck (nsy.wittstruck@iaumc.org, 515.974.8908).

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