



NO LONGER STRANGERS:  
EXPLORING IMMIGRATION ISSUES

Immigration is a complex and controversial issue with no easy answers. It relates to political notions such as territorial sovereignty, economic growth, and cultural identity, but it also relates to Christian principles such as hospitality, compassion, and the value of family relations. As Christians, we must not shy away from discussing immigration. We are called to think and talk about it, in our homes, with our friends, and in our churches. Adult forums or formation classes should be places where we can address difficult issues and exchange opinions with love and respect.

This resource can be used for personal study or group discussions. It is designed to encourage prayerful reflection and respectful discussion about migration/immigration issues through the lens of scripture and shared Christian values. We encourage you to open your study with prayer and read one or more of the scripture passages about migration/immigration (some suggestions are included in this resource). We have included a list of questions so that you can reflect, consider opposing viewpoints, and discuss the issue with others with civility and respect. For a full list of resources, please visit [www.VenAdelante.org/NoStrangers](http://www.VenAdelante.org/NoStrangers).

*“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.” –Ephesians 2:19-20*

## SCRIPTURES ON HOSPITALITY / HOW TO TREAT THE STRANGER

Genesis 18:1-10 *Abraham welcomes three messengers and is promised a son*

Leviticus 19:33-34 *Treat the alien as the citizen*

Deuteronomy 24:14-15 *Do not withhold wages, whether Israelites or aliens*

John 4:1-30 *Jesus talks to a Samaritan woman*

Romans 12:9-13 *Extend hospitality to strangers*

Ephesians 2:15-20 *You are no longer strangers and aliens*

Hebrews 13:1-3 *Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers*

## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION / PERSONAL STUDY

Talking about immigration involves discussing concepts that seem to be at odds, such as the basic right to protect ourselves and the biblical mandate to welcome the stranger. Sections 1 and 2 discuss some of these contradictions, sometimes in the light of scripture. Section 3 challenges some commonly held notions about immigration, such as the idea that we are all children of immigrants who came to the U.S. willingly; it also invites a view of migration beyond the southern U.S. border. Section 4 focuses on personal and institutional experiences around welcoming immigrants and talking with others about immigration.

### SECTION 1: THE NEED FOR PROTECTION

- a. The poet Robert Frost wrote, "Good fences make good neighbors." What do you think this phrase means? Can you think of examples that illustrate and/or negate this phrase?
- b. As many as 8 million Americans live today in gated communities. Have you ever considered living in one? What could make gated communities a good or a bad idea?
- c. Several scriptures in the Old Testament talk about the importance of walls and watchtowers as a form of protection. For example, Proverbs 25:28 states that "like a city breached, without walls, is one who lacks self-control." What are some of the ways we act to protect ourselves, our families, and our nation?
- d. In the New Testament, walls are sometimes seen as barriers that divide rather than protect. Consider Ephesians 2:14, in which Paul states that Jesus "has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility [between Jews and Gentiles]." Does this scripture undermine the value of walls? Explain.

### EXAMPLES OF MIGRATIONS IN THE SCRIPTURES

*Genesis 37:12-36 Joseph is sold as a slave and ends up in Egypt*

*Exodus 5-14 Moses leads the people of Israel out of Egypt*

*Ruth 1 Ruth accompanies her mother-in-law to Judah*

*Nehemiah 2 Nehemiah is allowed to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls*

*Daniel 1-3 Daniel and his friends are sent to Babylon*

*Matthew 2:13-5 The Holy Family flees to Egypt to find refuge*

## SECTION 2: REACHING OUT TO THOSE WHO ARE DIFFERENT

- a. Have there been times when you felt like an outsider, a stranger, or a fish out of water? Describe what happened.
- b. Have there been times when you received a stranger? What did you say or do? How was that experience?
- c. Have you ever visited a foreign country? Have you ever been received by foreigners in their homes? How was that experience?
- d. From the episode of the Woman at the Well (John 4:1-10) to the healing of the Centurion's Servant (Luke 7:1-10), the gospels present Jesus as someone who seems interested in reaching out to those who are different—including people who were at the time feared or despised. How can we balance the need for protection with Jesus' example in reaching out to those who are different?
- e. Do you think there are similarities between today's immigrants and other racial, religious, or cultural groups that have been discriminated against in the past? Explain.

## SECTION 3: MIGRATION

- a. Name some biblical examples of personal, family, or communal migrations. (Some examples are listed on page 3). Why did they migrate? Where did they go? How were they received?
- b. Except for Native Americans, in the U.S. we all descend from people who came to this country in recent times. Do you know where your ancestors come from? What circumstances inspired or forced them to migrate? Did they feel welcome when they arrived?
- c. About 12.5 million Africans were forced to come to the U.S. as slaves. Entire economies often depended on their forced labor—from agriculture, manufacturing, and construction to their work as domestic servants. How does that reality shed light on our understanding of immigration?
- d. Do you think there are similarities between the long struggle of African Americans for civil rights and the situation of those who have come more recently as undocumented immigrants? Explain.
- e. We tend to think about migration as a U.S. problem that happens on our southern border, yet migration is a global issue. For example, since war broke out in Syria and other countries, millions of refugees have fled to other countries for safety; similarly, the current crisis of Venezuela is forcing millions to emigrate. What do you know about other countries' response to migration crises?

- f. Some political leaders have expressed profound concern about the influx of refugees in Europe. The prime minister of Hungary, for example, has expressed fear that if Muslim immigrants are allowed in, Europe will no longer be Christian. What do you make of that statement?
- g. We tend to emphasize *successful* migrations; many migrants and refugees have stated that they felt guided or protected by a higher power on their journeys. Yet there are many stories of migrants who end up returning home, are deported, or even die before reaching their destination. According to a story in *USA Today*, the remains of at least 2,832 migrants have been found in southern Arizona since 2001. What do you make of these sobering stories?

## SECTION 4: TALKING AND ACTING AROUND MIGRATION/ IMMIGRATION ISSUES

- a. Have you ever met people who were recent immigrants to this country? Have you ever received an immigrant in your home? Describe your interactions or experiences.
- b. Are there examples in your local community of people or organizations who have opened their doors to immigrants and/or refugees? Describe.
- c. How does your local church or diocese remember refugees and immigrants? Are they mentioned, for example, during the Prayers of the People, or is immigration a topic in sermons or formation programs? What actions has your local church taken to raise awareness about immigration or to support immigrants and refugees? Can you think of opportunities to do so?
- d. We live at a time of polarized disagreement around immigration and other issues. Do you think it's possible, despite having different philosophical positions, to find common ground on specific, practical issues? Can you think of any examples?
- e. Have you ever talked with a friend or neighbor about immigration? What did you say? Was there anything said that gave you a new perspective on the issue? Would you do it again?
- f. Facebook and Twitter are two of the media where people read and send messages about immigration and other controversial issues, sometimes reposting or retweeting stories that are inaccurate or using language or images that seem intended to exaggerate, ridicule, or insult. What is your opinion on the value of using social media to discuss controversial issues? Have you ever challenged the accuracy or the tone of something posted by someone? If so, how was that experience?

## TENETS FOR CIVIL DISCOURSE

*Civil Discourse: A five-week curriculum* is a resource published by the Office of Government Relations of the Episcopal Church. Written by members of the Presiding Bishop's staff, this course focuses on civil discourse as a primary strategy for learning from each other and explores how to use civil discourse for effecting change in our government. It covers tenets for civil discourse, values-based conversations, the messiness of policymaking, and the importance of maintaining a sacred space for debate. In order to be most effective, this curriculum requires skilled facilitators who will be able to encourage respectful, civil, and holy conversations around contentious issues.

The curriculum, including a leader guide and participant handouts, can be accessed at: [www.VenAdelante.org/tenets](http://www.VenAdelante.org/tenets). The following tenets are taken from Lesson 2, "Tenets for Civil Discourse."

RESPECT: No blaming, shaming, or attacking the other person.

LISTEN DEEPLY, discussing issues rather than people.

SPEAK FOR YOURSELF using "I" statements and personal experiences.

TRY TO UNDERSTAND other people's ideas and ask questions for clarification.

SHARE TALK TIME, giving everyone the opportunity to speak.

SAY "THANK YOU" when what someone has shared helps you.

SUSPEND JUDGMENT, presumptions, biases, and stereotypes, and seek to understand.

DISAGREE, DON'T DEBATE: It's not about winning an argument, but listening and learning together.

PRACTICE FORGIVENESS: When mistakes are made, seek to forgive and be forgiven.

PAY ATTENTION TO FEELINGS AND THOUGHTS. If someone hurts your feelings, acknowledge the comment (not the person) and explain why.

*“In God’s family, there are no outsiders, no enemies. Black and white, rich and poor, gay and straight, Jew and Arab, Muslim and Christian, Hindu and Buddhist, Hutu and Tutsi, Pakistani and Indian—all belong. When we start to live as brothers and sisters and to recognize our interdependence, we become fully human.”*  
—Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Nobel Peace Prize laureate for his work against apartheid in South Africa

*O God, our heavenly Father, whose glory fills the whole creation, and whose presence we find wherever we go: Preserve those who travel; surround them with your loving care; protect them from every danger; and bring them in safety to their journey’s end; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*  
—The Book of Common Prayer, p. 831

## ONLINE RESOURCES

You are only one click away from a list of resources about immigration from an Episcopal/Anglican perspective: Prayers and liturgies, advocacy groups, pointers for civil discourse, official statements, stories, surveys, and videos. Please follow this link:[www.VenAdelante.org/NoStrangers](http://www.VenAdelante.org/NoStrangers)

## FEEDBACK

Please send us your feedback about this resource by visiting [www.VenAdelante.org/contacto](http://www.VenAdelante.org/contacto).

This booklet was developed by Hugo Olaiz, associate editor of Latino/Hispanic resources for Forward Movement, in consultation with personnel of Episcopal Migrations Ministries and the Office of Government Relations of The Episcopal Church.

*On the cover: The entry of the Lord into Egypt with his mother and Joseph (old Coptic icon).*