

A Journey to Understanding Our Immigrant Neighbors



STUDY GUIDE

Compiled by members of St. John's Baptist Church Immigrant and Refugee Ministry Group (IRMG, 2022) using several external resources

A Journey to Understanding Our Immigrant Neighbors

A FOUR-WEEK STUDY GUIDE

Compiled by

The Immigration Study Guide Task Force
of the IRMG of SJBC – Charlotte, NC, 2022

With the permission and use of a Study Guide from:

The North Carolina Council of Churches: For You Were Once a Stranger,

www.nccouncilofchurches.org and

The God Who Sees, Karen González, 2019, Herald Press, www.heraldpres.com

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PREFACE

The purpose for this study guide:

To familiarize the St. John's family with the plight and contributions of the immigrants and refugees in North Carolina and especially the area of Charlotte. And to remind ourselves and others of the Biblical mandate, obligation, and duty we have as Christians to this population.

(St. John's Baptist Church Study Guide Task Force of the IRMG, 2022).

The debate about immigration policy continues to divide people of good will across our nation and our state. Immigration divides us, in part, because of both the breadth and the depth of the issues involved – from powerful global economics to fast-changing local cultures, from the complex world of international politics to family histories intricately woven across borders, from worldwide patterns of migration to the very heart of American identity.

The question of how to respond to the complicated realities of immigration has divided us not only as Americans, but also as people of faith. What do our faith traditions have to say about immigrants and foreigners? What resources do we have for naming forms of oppression and liberation in our society? And how might we learn to live with such radical hospitality that we find ourselves ready to welcome even the “least of these” (Matthew 25:40) – willing to obey God rather than the laws of any human authority (see Acts 5:29)?

To think theologically about immigration may not provide people of faith with specific policy solutions; however, it does change the nature of the debate itself, transposing it from the realm of fear and scarcity to the realm of love, generosity, and abundance.

St. John's has always been a forward moving church in advocating against racism, promoting gender recognition, and promoting love and justice for all. In the 1973 rewriting of the Church Covenant we covenant together to “recognize the worth of every person with love and justice toward all.”

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

To achieve this purpose, we reviewed two curriculum guides compiled by the North Carolina Council of Churches: *Becoming the Church Together, Immigration, the Bible, and Our New Neighbors* and *For You Were Once a Stranger, Immigration in the U.S. through the Lens of Faith*. We also read the book, *The God Who Sees*, by Karen González, published in 2019. The task force then decided how to best present this information to the church family. We created this guide with three specific components:

- Challenge Assumptions
- Educate and Inform
- Inspire Action

The first component of our guide is, “Challenge Assumptions.” This is one lesson which leads the class through reflection of assumptions about immigrants to assess where our thoughts about immigrants have come from and if they are true. The lesson also discusses terminology and prepares the class for further study.

The second component of our guide is, “Educate and Inform.” This component is presented in two lessons. The first explores some history and legal definitions, problems with the current system, and North Carolina in particular. The second lesson explores religious responses in the past and Scriptures that guide us on how we should respond as members of a faith community.

The final component is, “Inspire Action.” This lesson explores our call to faith and provides information on how members can respond with a focus on particular agencies in Charlotte and North Carolina.

We have learned much from our review of these materials and hope that you will too.

Disclaimer:

The information related to U.S. Immigration Laws and Enforcement referenced in this Study Guide is continually subject to change and should be confirmed with current available data. (2022)

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LESSON 1

CHALLENGE ASSUMPTIONS

Opening Prayer

Focusing the Class

Have each class member reflect on the following questions:

1. What is your or your ancestors' immigration story?
2. Why did you or your family members leave their homeland and come to the United States?
3. Was it a story of welcome or hardship?

Ask class members to share their reflections.

Group Discussion

The facilitator should be prepared to summarize key points from the information presented below about the national debate on immigration.

While popular perception may hold that the majority of immigrants are in the U.S. illegally, undocumented immigrants represent only slightly more than one-fourth (26%) of the foreign-born population. Anti-immigration laws and policies, along with raids by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), lead to discrimination against anybody who looks or sounds foreign, including U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents.

Generally speaking, attitudes about immigrants in North Carolina began to shift noticeably at the beginning of the 2000's. Two different events, the attacks of September 11, 2001 and the release of census data showing a tremendous increase in North Carolina's Hispanic population, suddenly loomed large in the public consciousness. The threat of another terrorist attack and the knowledge that many undocumented people had come to live here fueled the fire of fear. Some North Carolinians believed that "illegals" were flaunting the law. Elected officials joined the fray, stirring anti-immigrant sentiment to pursue political agendas.

Where do immigrants to the U.S. come from? The answer is quite different when comparing lawful permanent residents and undocumented immigrants. The Migration Information Source of the Migration Policy Institute (2/11/2021) provides the following information: In fiscal year 2019, 1 million immigrants became lawful permanent residents (LPRs, also known as green card holders). The number of new LPRs in 2019 decreased by 64,800 from the prior year. In the past decade, the annual number of new green card recipients has ranged from 991,000 to 1.2 million. The top five countries of birth for new permanent residents in 2019 were Mexico (15%), mainland China (6%), India (5%), the Dominican Republic (5%) and the Philippines (4%). An estimated 11 million unauthorized immigrants resided in the U.S. in 2018. The top five countries of birth for these individuals were Mexico (51%), El Salvador (7%), Guatemala (5%), and India and Honduras (4% each).

A large body of evidence concludes that undocumented immigrants provide much more in taxes paid and work provided than they receive in public benefits. According to the New American Economy, undocumented immigrants contributed \$13 billion into the Social Security funds in 2016 and \$3 billion to Medicare. Though they have no work permits, an estimated 8 million of the 11 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S. do work, both on and off the books. Since they do not have Social Security numbers and are not authorized to work legally in the U.S., they are not eligible for any Social Security benefits.

Undocumented immigrants also contribute significantly to state and local taxes, collectively paying an estimated \$11.74 billion annually (Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, March 2017). They pay on average an estimated 8% of their incomes in state and local taxes. To put this in perspective, the top 1% of taxpayers pay an average tax rate of just 5.4%. Granting legal status to all undocumented immigrants in the United States as part of a comprehensive immigration reform and allowing them to work legally would increase their state and local tax contributions by \$2.18 billion a year. Personal income tax collections would increase by \$1.1 billion a year. Sales and excise taxes collected would increase by \$702 million and property taxes by \$362 million.

Questions to discuss:

1. Why do you think immigration is such a hot topic?
2. What concerns you the most about the issue of immigration?
3. Do you think these are issues that should be discussed in the church?

Biblical Reflections

Theology supplies a way of thinking about migration that keeps the human issues at the center of the debate and reminds us that our own existence as pilgrim people is migratory in nature.

Theology offers not just more information but a new imagination, one that reflects at its core what it means to be human before God and live together in community by seeking to overcome all that divides us in order to reconcile us in all our relationships.

Choose some or all of the following passages to read aloud and discuss:

Matthew 2:12-18

- If Mary and Joseph and Jesus attempted to enter the United States today, do you think they would be able to enter easily and legally? What does your faith or value system teach about justice, welcoming and the human rights of each individual?

Matthew 8:5-13

- When Jesus praises a symbol of foreign dominance and corruption (the Centurion) for having more faith in God than all of Israel, how do you think the people around him reacted? Does Jesus' acceptance of a foreigner change how we treat people who make their new homes in our communities?

Matthew 25:31-46

- Who are the "strangers" in Matthew 25? Does this include all immigrants? Jesus never explicitly addresses the issue of immigration. How can his life and teaching help us develop a Christ-like response to this issue? Have you seen these values carried out or ignored in your faith community or in public life?

Closing Statement and Challenge

Today we have reflected on how our own families came to the U.S. We have discussed popular perceptions of immigrants and immigration and reflected on some biblical scripture as it relates to our assumptions. In the following days reflect on becoming willing to consider changing or challenging some assumptions that you hold.

Further Study

Martin Luther King, Jr. in a "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" wrote about the white, liberal, religious leaders:

"I must make two honest confessions to you, my Christian and Jewish brothers. First, I must confess that over the past few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Councillor or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to 'order' than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: 'I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action'; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom..."

Discuss how this is relevant to the immigration debate today.

LESSON 2

EDUCATE & INFORM

Opening Prayer

Focusing the Class

Different words are used to describe people who come to the U.S. from other countries. Words have political implications. Some we use interchangeably; some we stay away from. Here we look at their deeper meaning and purposes.

Write the words on a chalk board or poster paper so all the participants can see them:

- Immigrant
- Migrant
- Undocumented immigrants
- Unauthorized immigrants
- Unauthorized working adults
- Illegal immigrants
- Illegal aliens
- Unlawful workers

What is the distinction between immigrant and migrant? At times these words are used interchangeably. All immigrants are migrants- people who have left their homes and traveled to a new place. Immigrants have all crossed national borders, whereas migrants may move from one part of the country to another. The word immigration implies the intention of permanently settling in a new country.

How do we refer to the people who came to the United States surreptitiously or came holding temporary visas and stayed after their visas expired? We use several terms interchangeably in this guide. Undocumented immigrants refer to the roughly 11 million people who are in the U.S. without documents attesting that they are authorized to be here. Undocumented workers refer to the adults in this group who are in the workforce. Unauthorized immigrants or unauthorized working adults are synonymous terms to undocumented. So is the term people without documents. These are the preferred terms. They describe without judgment, and are used in respect without inflaming passions.

Illegal immigrants, illegal aliens, and unlawful workers are widely used terms and appear frequently in legislation and newspaper accounts of immigration issues. **Faith communities try to avoid any term that implies that a human being is illegal.** While we recognize that many people have crossed our borders or overstayed their visas without legal authorization and have therefore violated immigration laws, they are human beings entitled to internationally acclaimed human rights, and they are not in and of themselves illegal.

Group Discussion

The facilitator should be prepared to summarize key points from the information presented below about some of the history of immigration in the United States.

In the earliest years of this century, the large number of Latin American immigrants is unprecedented and is unique in that it is the first time in the history of the United States that a huge mass of immigrants lack the status to legally work in this country. When the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 passed, there were between three and four million undocumented people in the U. S.; by 2006, estimates of undocumented people in the U.S. soared to 12 million. In addition, this wave of newcomers has come to parts of the country that have traditionally seen little to no immigration. Latin American immigration to the United States accelerated over the last decade.

In December of 2003 several immigrant workers from a local restaurant in a Chicago suburb met with clergy and lay leaders. The workers were not being paid overtime for their work in excess of 40 hours per week. They were also being harassed and insulted, and in some cases outright physically attacked by their employer. They asked the congregations to stand with them to demand a change in their working conditions. A local pastor asked the workers why they chose to come to the United States and he received a response that surprised him. "We come here because of horrible economic conditions at home," the worker said. "We are not here by choice. Who in their right mind comes here knowing they will be insulted and looked at as a threat? Who risks their lives crossing a militarized border and leaves their family, their culture, their life behind, unless they have to?" The answer was simple yet profound. It provided the clergy and community leaders the insight they needed to stand with these workers. In the end a combined effort led by religious leaders got the workers the changes they needed in their workplace. Since 2000, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has markedly increased its activity in nearly every corner of the U.S. The heightened level of enforcement was exacerbated by the sharp anti-immigrant backlash to the tragic events of September 11, 2001.

Between the year 2000 and 2019, the immigrant population from Afghanistan to the U.S. grew noticeably from 44,000 to 133,000. These were years of war in Afghanistan. In an attempt to end 20-year involvement of military activity in Afghanistan, the U.S. withdrew troops from that country in August of 2021. Since that date, "The State Department has brought in roughly 75,000 Afghan refugees to the U.S.," according to a January 25, 2022 *Newsweek* article.

As the U.S. withdrew troops from Afghanistan, many of the Afghan people began to feel deserted and threatened as a country unprotected from invasion and takeover. The Afghans left their country by the thousands during this few weeks period, many coming to the U.S. These Afghan refugees are being assisted and welcomed by the U.S. partly because of the assistance our military received during their time in Afghanistan.

Presently, Charlotte and a number of nearby NC towns are becoming the new homes for these refugees. Many of our citizens want to offer hospitality. We need only look around with our local agencies known for helping with refugees and immigrants to find places to support. Do you feel a need to seek out an avenue where you might be able to directly assist with an Afghan family or individual? Discuss possibilities and ideas of hospitality.

Questions for Reflection

- What happens to relationship between worker and employer when the worker is undocumented?
- How might unscrupulous employers use the situation to their advantage?

Closing Statement and Challenge

We have reflected on the language we use to talk about immigrants and looked at some history about immigration. In the following days reflect on whether these insights make clearer your response to the immigrants and strangers in our midst today.



TWO NORTH CAROLINA STORIES

Smithfield Packing Company

In January 2007, 21 Smithfield Packing Company employees were arrested in an ICE raid in North Carolina, during a union organizing campaign of the United Food and Commercial Workers, a move that can clearly be read as intimidation of workers taking collective action to improve their working conditions.

This was done despite the massive mobilization in the spring of 2006 that put millions of immigrant workers and their allies on the streets of every major U.S. city. Anti-immigrant forces remain in control of the discourse that frames the issues. The critical issues, we are told, center on the need for border security and other law enforcement measures to stem the tide of illegal immigration to the United States.

Questions for Reflection

1. What does big business stand to gain from creating a class of workers with limited rights and temporary status?
2. Why do you think some immigrant workers endure awful working conditions?
3. Have you ever been in a situation in which you had to make an “impossible” decision?

Labor Shortages

For years, North Carolina has experienced a labor shortage in agriculture. A partial solution to this problem has been the expanded use of the H-2A visa program. The number of H-2A guest workers certified in North Carolina increased from 19,786 in 2016 to 22,052 in 2020. The North Carolina Growers Association (MCGA) continues to be the largest employer of H-2A guest workers in the nation. This history has created a “migrant pathway” between Mexico, other Latin American countries, and North Carolina, with workers traveling between countries during growing seasons. Some of those workers come to North Carolina to work in tobacco fields. In 2015 the number of farmworkers who picked tobacco accounted for 21% of all H-2A worker positions in the state. In 2019, the figure was 48%. Among the hazards faced by these workers is nicotine poisoning. Although many H-2A workers in North Carolina have union protection through the Farm Labor Organizing Committee, they are reluctant to complain to authorities about poor working conditions for fear of losing their visa status and thus losing their livelihoods.

Questions for Reflection

1. How does this story differ from the Smithfield Packing story above?
2. Does having a legal “migrant pathway” sound like progress?

LESSON 3

EDUCATE & INFORM

Opening Prayer

Focusing the Class

Problems with the current system

Native born U.S. workers have seen their standard of living decline steadily in recent years for a number of reasons: the decline of the manufacturing sector and the outsourcing of jobs, falling rates of unionization, and the widening of the income gap between the wealthy and the rest of us. Many blame their problems on immigrant workers, who have become more prominent in many industries – services, hospitality, construction, garment manufacturing, agriculture, to name a few – as wage levels and standards have fallen. In fact, some research has shown that low-wage workers are negatively impacted by competition with immigrants.

Because undocumented workers are under constant threat of deportation and do not have work-authorization (work permit), they are forced to accept inferior wages and conditions and cannot effectively assert their rights in the workplace. Therefore, undocumented workers compete with U.S. citizens and other work-authorized individuals on an uneven playground. This harms all workers and lowers the standards and wages for everybody, to the advantage of employers.

What are your thoughts on how the current system has created this problem or helped to agitate it?

Group Discussion

The facilitator should be prepared to summarize key points from the information presented below about the pathway to permanent legal status in the United States.

Contrary to what seems to be a common misperception, an immigrant can only acquire permanent legal status in the United States in a limited number of ways. This article provides a very basic overview of the pathways to permanent lawful status available in our US immigration system. Readers should use it as a general guide. Those seeking legal advice on a specific situation should contact a qualified immigration attorney.

Our U.S. immigration system can be divided into three parts: Family-based immigration, Employment-based immigration, and Humanitarian-based immigration. Of these, the most common way for an immigrant to obtain legal status is through an application filed by a US citizen or Lawful Permanent Resident family member. The family-based immigration system is divided into two general areas:

1. Immediate Relative Petitions: A United States Citizen (USC) may apply for his/her spouse, children (under 21), and parents. This is called an Immediate Relative Petition. Such beneficiaries can acquire legal status more quickly than beneficiaries of preference petitions. An approved immigrant visa petition does not grant the right to live in the US; it is simply the foundation for the beneficiary to apply for lawful permanent residency.
2. Preference Petitions: The second most common way for an immigrant to obtain legal status is through what's known as the Preference Category petition. These petitions seek an available immigrant visa from the amount available each year. There is an annual cap on these immigration visas, so backlogs result. A USC may also apply for his or her unmarried sons and daughters (21 and over). Processing usually takes about 6 years (unless the petitioner is from Mexico or the Philippines, in which case it takes about 15 years). A USC may apply for married sons and daughters, but processing takes about 8 years (18 years for petitioners from the Philippines and Mexico). A USC over 21 may apply for siblings with a waiting period of about 11 years (with Mexico, the waiting period could be 14 years and with the Philippines it could be 22 years.)

A Lawful Permanent Resident (LPR) may file a preference petition for his or her spouse and minor children and for adult unmarried sons and daughters. The waiting periods to get legal status for applicants in these categories range from six to up to twenty years, primarily depending on the nature of the family relationship and applicant's country of origin.

It's important to note that just because the spouse or parent has filed a petition for their family member in this Preference Category, it does not give the family member any immediate legal right to live in the United States. Under the law, the family member must wait until an immigrant visa becomes available to them, which can be many, many years into the future depending upon the backlog in any given category. Beneficiaries of approved immediate relative petitions and preference category petitions must further demonstrate their eligibility for lawful permanent residence. Just because they have a qualifying relationship with a US citizen or Lawful Permanent Resident, their criminal history, immigration history, poverty or other individual circumstances may disqualify them due to the many "grounds of inadmissibility" found in our laws.

A second path to legal status involves an immigrant visa petition filed by a US Employer for a necessary, qualified worker. Generally, this process must first be approved by the United States Department of Labor after the employer has established that there are insufficient available, qualified, and willing U.S. workers to fill the position being offered at the prevailing wage and that hiring a foreign worker will not adversely affect the wages and working conditions of similarly employed U.S. workers. Beneficiaries of employment-based immigrant visa petitions must also prove that they are admissible to the US, not only that they are qualified to fill the position offered by the US employer.

It is important to note that there is no available employment-based immigrant visa category for year-round jobs that require less than two years of experience. Though not discussed here, the system for temporary workers is also very stringent, subject to caps, and costly for the employer.

A third way for an immigrant to gain Lawful Permanent Resident status is through the narrow pathways based on humanitarian crises and circumstances. For example, one of the most visible ways is to first obtain refugee or asylee status. Refugees and asylees both face particularized persecution but the distinction is in the process to obtain protection in the US. To qualify for asylum, one must prove that he or she was the victim of persecution in his or her home country under one of the five protected areas (race, religion, nationality, membership in a social group, or political opinion). An applicant must apply within one year following entry to the U.S. It is a very time-consuming process because one has to establish eligibility, often without any documentation of persecution. It is always difficult to find such documentation. Often, attorneys try to get it through State Department Reports and other international news sources, in affidavits from country experts and from whatever sources available to show that this particular individual was targeted and would most likely be persecuted if he/she returned to the home country. Refugees, likewise, face persecution if returned to their home country, but enter the US already having established their status while asylum seekers must prove it stateside in front of a US immigration judge or official. These processes are complex, lengthy and uncertain given frequent changes in US policy.



Finally, the humanitarian part of our US immigration system also allows a limited number of persons in very specific categories to “self-petition” – that is to apply for legal status on their own behalf.

This includes:

1. Certain specified groups of Salvadorans and Guatemalans
2. Persons afforded protection under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)
3. A category known as “Special Immigrant Juveniles” (these are children who have been neglected, abused or abandoned by their parents)
4. Victims of human trafficking
5. Certain victims of other crimes

The general overview above demonstrates how difficult it can be for one to obtain permanent lawful status in the U.S. The individual seeking to come to the US to work hard and live a safe, peaceful life will find it difficult to immigrate absent close family ties or exceptional skills and credentials needed by a US employer. For those who do have a pathway available to them within the limited possibilities described above, the waiting period is often measured in decades, not in months or years.

Questions for Discussion

1. Are the waiting periods after application surprising to you?
2. Were you aware of these rules or know anybody currently going through this process?

Closing Statement and Challenge

Today we have reflected on problems with the immigration system, and how immigrants obtain legal status. Can you imagine living waiting decades to be reunited with family? Or waiting years before you can work in a job offered to you? Or living a life without work authorization because you are shut out of the system completely?

FURTHER STUDY

By looking to the past we can see that these problems are not new, they just change from age to age. Look at some of the issues from the past that perhaps could also be seen as problems with the system of the times.

1. People of faith opposing slavery and providing support for the Underground Railroad.
2. Actively opposing the Japanese internment camps in the 1940's, to actively opposing the Arab/Middle Eastern internment camps of the 2000's
3. Standing alongside African Americans and other people of color in the struggle for civil rights, to opening up doors in sanctuary for Central and South American refugees.
4. Standing with low-wage workers demanding the right to collective bargaining, to marching with millions demanding just immigration reform.

LESSON 4

INSPIRE ACTION

Opening Prayer

Focusing the Class

The Call of Faith

Does a part of your faith inspire you to action in this particular arena? Why?

How can faith communities help promote a spirit of tolerance and welcome in the midst of rapid change?

While immigration issues must be analyzed in the context of today's political landscape and economic challenges, the religious community can and must inject the dimensions of justice and morality. People and communities of faith have struggled with the question of what our obligations are to people who are outsiders to our communities – strangers. The foundation story of the Jewish people is God's liberation of God's people out of slavery in Egypt, whose ancestors had come there to escape drought and famine in their land. The basic worship credo of ancient Israel begins with, "A wandering Aramean was my father." (Deuteronomy 26:5) Therefore, God's Torah has constant reminders that the Israelite community must not mistreat foreigners residing among them. "You Shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." (Exodus 22:21)

At the core of Christian belief is the profoundly radical vision of God lifting up the poor, the destitute, the homeless and the reviled over the comfortable and wealthy. Immigrants – strangers – are included in the vision of those that need mercy and justice... Jesus was homeless, ate with lepers and sinners, and taught in the Sermons on the Mount and on the Plain that the last shall be first. In the Book of Matthew, Chapter 2, Jesus' family flees to Egypt as refugees from persecution and the threat of death in their home country. Other faiths – indeed all religions – believe in justice. We are one people, one community. We are all kin.

Group Discussion

The leader can focus on the points below about prevailing thoughts in North Carolina about laws and ICE activities and consider what we as Christians can do.

Beginning in the early 2000s, there was a sharp increase in local enforcement of federal immigration laws. **One of the factors related to this increase was the implementation of the 287(g) program. Section 287(g) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (1996), allows the Department of Homeland Security to enter into formal written agreements (Memoranda of Agreements or MOAs) with state and local law enforcement agencies. These MOAs authorize selected officers to perform certain functions of federal immigration agents under the supervision of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).** While the purpose of the 287(g) program was publicized as being to arrest and deport dangerous felons such as human traffickers and drug dealers, research has shown that many of those who were deported were arrested for driving-related and other minor offenses.

In 2006 the Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Department was one of the first local law enforcement agencies in the country to implement the 287(g) program. Several other North Carolina counties followed, making North Carolina a leader in this effort. These programs have led to the deportation of thousands of immigrants statewide. According to the NC Sheriff's Association, a full one-third of those deported in 2008 under 287(g) statewide were arrested for vehicle-related offenses other than DUI. After a long and concerted effort on the part of grassroots immigrant and other organizations, advocates, and the election of a new sheriff, the 287(g) program was ended in Mecklenburg County on Dec. 6, 2018. **There was a decline in the number of local law enforcement agencies across the U.S. with 287(g) agreements from 72 in 2011 to 35 in 2016. However, as of August 2021, the numbers had increased from 35 to 150 (The 287(g) Program: State and Local Immigration Enforcement. Congressional Research Service, August 12, 2021).** For additional information about the 287(g) program see: Delegation and Divergence: A Study of 287(g) State and Local Immigration Enforcement by Randy Capps, Marc R. Rosenblum, Cristina Rodriguez and Muzaffar Chishti. Migration Policy Institute, 2011; and The 287(g) Program: An Overview. American Immigration Council, July 8, 2021. <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org>

The debate about immigration policy – and immigrants themselves – continues to boil across North Carolina. In the midst of this heated conversation, people of faith have begun to take a stand for immigrant rights. Hundreds of churches are involved in immigrant and refugee ministries. Religious leaders are voicing their opposition to discriminatory and punitive anti-immigrant measures. Faith-based advocacy groups and ministries are forming alliances across racial and social-economic boundaries to encourage society to “welcome the stranger.”

The NC Council of Churches has long been a statewide leader in helping to mobilize churches and other faith-based organizations to be in solidarity with immigrants and refugees in North Carolina. (www.ncchurches.org/immigrant-rights/) FaithAction International House, a nonprofit organization in Greensboro, works directly with immigrants and also provides “Stranger to Neighbor” trainings for many organizations such as schools, social services and health agencies, faith communities, city departments and businesses both locally and across the state. (www.faithaction.org)

The NC Immigrant Rights Program of the American Friends Service Committee, also based in Greensboro, “seeks to build a community which values the human dignity of all NC residents. We work toward a North Carolina in which immigrants and non-immigrants advocate together for fair and just policies that respect the rights of all.” They work closely with Siembra NC, a grassroots group of undocumented Latinx residents of Greensboro, Burlington and other parts of the Triad. See current information about the activities of both groups on Facebook (AFSC NC page and Siembra NC page).

Biblical and other Spiritual Reflections

The religious community has, within its teachings and readings, a profound tradition of welcome and hospitality.

- “The strangers who sojourn with you shall be to you as the natives among you, and you shall love them as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” (Leviticus 19:33-34)
- Jesus tells us to welcome the strangers (Matthew 25:35)
- for “what you do to the least of my brethren, you do unto me.” (Matthew 25:40)
- The Qur’an tells us that we should, “serve God...and do good to...orphans, those in need, neighbors who are near, neighbors who are strangers, the companion by your side, the wayfarer that you meet, and those who have nothing.” (4:36)
- The Hindu scripture tells us, “The guest is a representative of God.” (1.11.2)

Closing Statement and Challenge

Today we have reflected what our faith community requires of us to respond to the stranger in our midst.

Is there something you can do this week to make a difference?

FURTHER STUDY

They came first for the Communists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for the Trade unionists, and I didn't speak up Because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then They came for the Catholics, and I didn't Speak up because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me, and by that time No one was left to speak up.

Pastor Martin Niemoller



GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Asylee

An asylee is a person who has been granted asylum. After one year, an asylee may apply for Lawful Permanent Resident status (green card).

Asylum

Asylum is permission granted to a person fleeing persecution in another country, as described below, to continue to live and work in the United States. The person who is granted asylum (asylee) will eventually have the opportunity to apply for Lawful Permanent Residence and citizenship.

Asylum Seeker

Asylum seekers are persons who have fled their home countries because of personal danger and seek protection in another country. They must provide evidence of a “credible fear of persecution due to race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion” in order to receive an opportunity to seek legal protective status or asylum. Unlike refugees, asylum seekers must apply for protection in the country of destination---either at a port of entry or from within the country.

Guest Worker Programs

Temporary workers may be admitted to the United States under one of more than 70 visa categories. Guest workers who may be referenced in this guide are mainly workers who came to the United States under one of three visa programs: H-2A (unlimited annual number of visas for seasonal farm workers); H-2B (66,000 annual nonagricultural visas for landscapers, roofers, laborers, meatpacking plant workers and other); and H-1B (85,000 annual visas are for professionally skilled workers.) However, there are several categories of exemptions to this quota.

H-2A

The Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) of 1952 authorized a nonimmigrant visa category, known as H-2, for foreign agricultural workers to come to the United States and perform temporary services. The Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 amended the INA of 1952 by dividing the H-2 program into two parts: H-2A for agricultural workers and H-2B for nonagricultural workers. The Employment and Training Administration (ETA) of the U.S. Department of Labor (US-DOL) and the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) administer both the H-2A and H-2B programs. Two conditions must be met before the ETA will approve an H-2A petition. First, the employer must demonstrate that there are insufficient numbers of qualified and available U.S. workers to perform the agricultural jobs for which foreign workers are being requested. Second, the employer must demonstrate that the hiring of foreign workers will not adversely affect the earnings and working conditions of similarly employed U.S. workers.

Immigrant

An immigrant is a person living in a country other than that of his/her birth and intends to remain there permanently, as opposed to nonimmigrants who intend to remain only temporarily, whether for a few days on a business trip, a few months as a seasonal worker, or a few years as a student. In the U.S. the following are types of immigration status: legal permanent resident; conditional permanent resident (based on marriage to U.S. citizen, expires after 2 years); naturalized citizen; refugee/asylee; persons with certain pending applications; Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and may also include asylum seekers who are allowed to work while their applications are pending; temporary/nonimmigrant visas; undocumented immigrants--- those who have either entered the U.S. without permission or who have overstayed a visa. The Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) makes basic distinctions between immigrants and nonimmigrants with regard to length of stay and permissible activities. A nonimmigrant may remain only for a specific period of time and may engage in activities allowed for the assigned nonimmigrant classification under INA 101(a)(15). Nonimmigrants will be subject to removal or other measures if they fail to maintain nonimmigrant status, fail to depart at the end of the authorized period of stay, or engage in unauthorized activities.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)

The U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is a federal law enforcement agency under the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. ICE was created in 2003 through a merger of the investigative and interior enforcement elements of the former U.S. Customs Service and the Immigration and Naturalization Service. ICE now has more than 20,000 law enforcement and support personnel in more than 400 offices in the U.S. and around the world. The agency's mission, as stated on its website, is "to protect America from the cross-border crime and illegal immigration that threaten national security and public safety. This mission is executed through the enforcement of more than 400 federal statutes and focuses on immigration enforcement and combating transnational crime."

Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986

This law, best known for connecting strengthened enforcement with legalization provisions for unauthorized immigrants, marked a significant milestone in immigration policy. The three key components of the law were: tougher border enforcement; penalties for employers who hired unauthorized immigrants; and legalization for unauthorized immigrants who had been in the U.S. for five years or more.

Lawful Permanent Resident

A Lawful Permanent Resident (LPR) is a non-citizen who has been granted authorization to live and work in the United States on a permanent basis. As proof of that status, a person is granted a permanent resident card, commonly called a "green card". Lawful permanent residents may leave the U.S. multiple times and reenter, as long as they do not intend to stay outside the U.S. for one year or more. Staying outside of the country for more than one year (without a reentry permit) may result in loss of permanent resident status.

Migrant

A migrant is a person who moves from one place to another, especially to find work or better living conditions. Migrant is an umbrella term, not defined under international law, the common lay understanding of which is a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons. (International Organization for Migration)

North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA):

Treaty that went into effect in 1994 between the United States, Mexico and Canada, facilitating the free movement of labor and capital and removing certain taxes, environmental laws and worker protections.

Refugee

A refugee is a person who has fled his or her country of nationality and who is unable or unwilling to return to that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. Once they have fled their home, they must apply for refugee status with an official entity, such as a government or the United Nations Refugee Agency, who determines whether or not a person meets the definition of a refugee. The process of obtaining refugee status can often take years, forcing many applicants to wait abroad in refugee camps with dangerous living conditions.

287(g) Program

Section 287(g) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) permits the delegation of certain immigration enforcement functions to state and local law enforcement agencies. 287(g) agreements enable specially trained state or local law enforcement officers to perform specific functions related to the investigation, apprehension or detention of non-citizens during a predetermined time frame and under federal oversight by the Department of Homeland Security's Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Although 287(g) became law in 1996, the first 287(g) agreement was not implemented until 2002. Currently there are two types or models of 287(g) agreements for which a locality can apply: the Jail Enforcement Model (JEM) and Warrant Service Officer (WSO) Model. These models have different resource and oversight requirements and each provides different benefits to ICE. The WSO model, first implemented in 2019, is narrower in scope, requires fewer local resources than the JEM, and is currently the model most often used.

United States Citizen (USC)

A U.S. citizen is someone who was born in the 50 states, Guam, Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands; a naturalized citizen; or derived citizenship by law from US citizen parents.



TAKE ACTION!

There are many concrete things that you can do to express solidarity with immigrants and to work for immigrant rights.

Here are some ideas:

Education

- Preach a sermon on "Welcoming the Immigrant"
- Include immigrants in pastoral prayers.
- Teach a Sunday-school class or small group on immigration.
- Host an event on immigration at your congregation.
- Offer a resource table at your congregation on immigration issues.

Service & Ministry

- Form a congregational partnership with a local Latino center, immigrant rights group, or other similar organization.
- Attend worship at a congregation with immigrants in your community.
- Host community meals at your congregation that include immigrants, creating a space where all are welcome to share.
- Visit a migrant farmworker camp in your area with members of your congregation.

Political & Public Action

- Contact national political leaders to express support for comprehensive immigration reform and opposition to enforcement-only measures.
- Meet with members of state and local governments to express support for measures including access to higher education, drivers' licenses, and opposition to anti-immigrant legislation.
- Anytime there is the need or opportunity to support the immigrant community in a public way, contact your elected officials on behalf of immigrants and refugees.

Websites make it very easy to find ways to donate your time and money. Listed below are several agencies that work to help immigrants and refugees understand our system and feel more at home.

You can choose from many ways to help. Some might include:

- Driving immigrants or refugees to appointments.
- Helping them set up appointments
- Helping them read various types of information and applications
- Helping with socialization
- Serving as a tutor in an after-school program for immigrant and refugee children

Below are agencies in the Charlotte area with opportunities to volunteer:

ourBridge for Kids

3925 Willard Farrow Dr.
Charlotte NC 28215
Sil Ganzo, Executive Director
Shani Mann, Volunteer Coordinator
Email: volunteering@joinourbridge.org
980-272-6022
www.joinourbridge.org

Refugee Support Services

3925 Willard Farrow Dr.
Charlotte NC 28215
Lindsay LaPlante, Executive Director
Email: lindsaylaplante@refugeesupportservices.org
Madison Bishop, Volunteer Coordinator
Email: madisonbishop@refugeesupportservices.org
www.refugeesupportservices.org

Latin American Coalition

4938 Central Ave.
Charlotte NC 28205
704-531-3848
www.latinamericancoalition.org

Project 658

3646 Central Ave.
Charlotte, NC 28205
Mark Landon, Family Advocate
704-733-9934 (office); 980-224-0580 (cell)
mlandon@project658.com
www.project658.com

Carolina Refugee Resettlement Agency

5009 Monroe Rd, Suite 100
Charlotte NC 28205
Marsha Hirsch, Executive Director
Email: marsha.hirsch@carolinarefugee.org
704-535-8803
www.carolinarefugee.org

Catholic Charities—Diocese of Charlotte

1123 S. Church St.
Charlotte NC 28203
Anggie Fernandez, Program Supervisor,
Immigrant and Citizenship Services
704-370-3219
www.ccdoc.org

International House

1817 Central Ave.
Charlotte NC 28205
Autumn Weil, Executive Director
704-333-8099
Email: aweil@ihclt.org
www.ihclt.org

Worship Resources

(may be used by leaders)

Selected Writings

Words from the sermon delivered by Dr. Nancy Morris, former Minister to Children and Adult Education Minister at St. John's on Heritage Sunday, March 15, 2015 at St. John's Baptist Church of Charlotte, NC.

- **Providing Sacred Spaces**

- "Hospitality welcomes the stranger and receives her just as she is."
- "Genuine hospitality lies at the heart of faith, from Abraham and Sarah to the Apostle Paul."
- "For God, hospitality had everything to do with identity. You shall love the stranger, God commanded, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. It was only because of God's welcome, God's compassion, and God's embrace of the stranger that Israel existed. God's people had known slavery, until God's great deliverance. They had known homelessness, until God's great gift of a promised land. And they had known exile. They knew what it meant to be the stranger and the refugee. And so Israel was to be different, welcoming the stranger and recognizing that the welfare of the community depended on the embrace of the one in need."

May it be so with us as we are constantly discovering that these we want to help are really helping us as they reveal their strength, their brilliance, their initiative, and love.

- **Prayers**

Interfaith Prayer

- *Remember the Immigrant: A Call-and-Response Prayer*

We serve a God who directs us to care especially for those most vulnerable in society. Our scriptures tell us of God's special concern for the "alien" or the "stranger," or as more contemporary translations say – the immigrant and the refugee.

For the Lord our god is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. God defends the cause of the orphan and the widow and loves the immigrant, giving the immigrant food and clothing. And we are to love those who are immigrants, for God's people were immigrants in Egypt.
(Deuteronomy 10:17-19)

Worship Resources

(continued)

We ask God to open our eyes to the struggles of immigrant workers, for we know that

We must not take advantage of a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether the worker is a resident or immigrant living in our town. We must pay the worker the wages promptly because the worker is poor and counting on it. (Deuteronomy 24:14)

God's desire is that those who build houses may live in them,

And that those who plant may eat. (Isaiah 65:22)

And yet we know this is not possible for many in our midst.

We know of: farmworkers who cannot feed their families; construction workers who have no homes; nursing home workers who have no health care; restaurant workers who could not afford a meal in the restaurant.

We know that too many immigrant workers among us are not receiving the fruits of their labor, nor the justice required by the courts.

God charges our judges to hear disputes and judge fairly, whether the case involves citizens or immigrants. (Deuteronomy 1:16)

But our laws do not adequately protect immigrants. Our legal and social service programs exclude many immigrants. Our education programs undervalue immigrant children.

God tells us that the community is to have the same rules for citizens and for immigrants living among us. This is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. Citizens and immigrants shall be the same before the Lord. (Numbers 15:15)

When the immigrant lives in our land,

We will not mistreat him or her. We will treat an immigrant as one of our native born. We will love an immigrant as ourselves, for God's people were once immigrants in Egypt. (Leviticus 19:33-34)

Worship Resources

(continued)

To those who employ immigrant workers, we lift up God's command:

Do not oppress an immigrant. God's people know how it feels to be immigrants because they were immigrants in Egypt. (Exodus 23:9)

And a special word to those who employ immigrant farmworkers:

Make sure immigrants get a day of rest. (Exodus 23:12)

To those who craft our immigration laws and policies, we lift up Gods' command:

Do not deprive the immigrant or the orphan of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge. Remember that God's people were slaves in Egypt and the Lord our God redeemed them from there. (Deuteronomy 24:17-18)

To all of us who seek to do God's will, help us to:

Love one another as God has loved us. Help us to treat immigrants with the justice and compassion that God shows to each of us.

- **Intercessory Prayer**
 - *For You Were Once a Stranger*

(The following intercessions may be all used together for a special liturgy, or particular intercessions may be chosen for use throughout the liturgical year.)

For an end to the violence and poverty that displace so many people from their homes and homelands, we pray to the Lord.

Response: Lord, hear our prayer.

For our leaders, that they may implement policies that allow for safe migration, just migrant working conditions, and an end to the detention of asylum seekers, while protecting our national safety, we pray to the Lord.

Response: Lord, hear our prayer.

Worship Resources

(continued)

For migrant workers, that they may labor in safe and just conditions, and that we who benefit from their labor may be truly grateful for what they provide, we pray to the Lord.

Response: Lord, hear our prayer.

For unaccompanied migrant children, that they may be protected from all harm and reunited with loving families, we pray to the Lord.

Response: Lord, hear our prayer.

For an end to human trafficking, that the dignity of all God's children will be protected, we pray to the Lord.

Response: Lord, hear our prayer.

For migrants, refugees, and strangers in our midst, that they may find hope in our concern for justice and feel the warmth of our love, we pray to the Lord.

Response: Lord, hear our prayer.

For our community, gathered here today to celebrate our unity under God, that we may come to greater understanding and acceptance of our differences, we pray to the Lord.

Response: Lord, hear our prayer.

For all those who are overwhelmed by loneliness, poverty, and despair, that they may be comforted through our help and kindness, we pray to the Lord.

Response: Lord, hear our prayer.

For those in special need, that the Lord in his divine mercy may heal the sick, comfort the dying, and keep travelers safe, we pray to the Lord.

Response: Lord, hear our prayer.

Worship Resources

(continued)

- *A Prayer for Immigrants and Refugees*

Our God, you have given us in your words the stories of persons who needed to leave their homelands – Abraham, Sarah, Ruth, Moses.

Help us to remember that when we speak of immigrants and refugees, we speak of Christ.

We forget that Christ's stories are so often concerning "the least of these" in our society – the stranger, the dominated, the excluded.

We confess that we often turn away.

You have shown us through the life of Jesus how we are called to relate to persons from different nations and cultures.

You have called us to be teachers of your word.

God, we ask you to open our minds and hearts to the challenges and invitation to become aware of those who are new in a strange land for we have all been strangers and in need of love of others.

Amen.



Other Resources

General Information about Immigrants and Immigration

- www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org The American Immigration Council website contains a wealth of current as well as historical information about all aspects of immigration in an “easy to locate and read” format. The Council “brings together problem solvers and employs four coordinated approaches to advance change—litigation, research, legislative and administrative advocacy, and communications. With this synergy, the Council works to advance positive public attitudes and create a more welcoming America.”
- *Frequently Requested Statistics on Immigrants and Immigration in the United States.* Jeanne Batalova, Mary Hanna, Christopher Levesque. Migration Information Source: The Online Journal of the Migration Policy Institute. February 11, 2021. www.migrationpolicy.org/article/frequently-requested-statistics-immigrants-and-immigration-united-states-2020
- *How Many Undocumented Immigrants Are in the United States and Who Are They?* Elaine Kamarch and Christine Stenglein. Policy 2020 Brookings. November 12, 2019. www.brookings.edu/policy2020/votervital/how-many-undocumented-immigrants-are-in-the-united-states-and-who-are-they/
- *Quick Immigration Statistics: United States.* The Immigrant Learning Center. 442 Main St., Malden, MA 02148. www.ilctr.org/quick-us-immigration-statistics/
- *The U.S. Immigration Debate.* Claire Felter, Danielle Renwick, Amelia Cheatham. Council on Foreign Relations. August 31, 2021. www.cfr.org/backgrounders/us-immigration-debate

Economics and Immigration

- *Undocumented Immigrants Quietly Pay Billions into Social Security and Receive No Benefits.* Nina Roberts and Kyi Ryssdal. Marketplace Morning Report. Jan. 28, 2019. www.marketplace.org/2019/01/28/undocumented-immigrants-quietly-pay-billions-social-security-and-receive-no
- *Undocumented Immigrants' State and Local Tax Contributions.* Lisa Christensen Gee, Matthew Gardner, Misha E. Hill, Meg Wiehe. Institute on Taxation & Economic Policy. March 2017. www.itep.org/immigration/

Other Resources

287(g) Program

- *The 287(g) Program: State and Local Immigration Enforcement*. Abigail F. Kolker, Analyst in Immigration Policy. Congressional Research Service. August 12, 2021 <https://crsreports.congress.gov> (enter Report # IF11898)
- *Delegation and Divergence: A Study of 287(g) State and Local Immigration Enforcement*. Randy Capps, Marc R. Rosenblum, Cristina Rodriguez, Muzaffar Chishti. Migration Policy Institute. 2011 www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/287g-divergence.pdf
- *The 287(g) Program: An Overview*. American Immigration Council. July 8, 2021 www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/287g-program-immigration

Refugee Status

- *Refugee Law and Policy in the U.S.* Fact Sheet. American Immigration Council. September 20, 2021. www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/overview-us-refugee-law-and-policy

Asylum

- *Asylum in the United States*. Fact Sheet. American Immigration Council. June 11, 2020. www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/asylum-united-states
- *The Difference Between Refugees, Asylum Seekers, and Migrants*. Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service. January 8, 2021. www.lirs.org/refugees-asylum-seekers-migrants-whats-the-difference/

Guest Worker Programs

- *Employment-Based Visa Categories in the United States*. American Immigration Council. July 8, 2021. <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/employment-based-visa-categories-united-states>
- *North Carolina is Driving Much of the H-2A Program's Growth: That Means More Exposure to What Workers Call the 'Green Monster'*. Da Yeon Eom. Midwest Center for Investigating Reporting. August 12, 2021. www.investigatamidwest.org/2021/08/12/tobacco
- *The H-2A Visa Program: Addressing Farm Labor Scarcity in North Carolina*. Alejandro Gutierrez-Li. NC State Economist. July 19, 2021.
- *The H-2A Visa Program in North Carolina*. NC State Extension. July 6, 2021.

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Permission has been given by Dr. Nancy Morris to use quotes from a sermon she delivered at St. John's March 15, 2015. The sermon is entitled "Providing Sacred Spaces." Dr. Morris is a former Children's Minister and Adult Education Minister at St. John's. She now lives in Virginia.

The Task Force acknowledges Anna McLeod Cushman for videos she created for St. John's on Introduction to the Law Related to Immigrants and Refugees. The first in the series is *Immigration 101*. You can find the video at this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/c/StJohnsBaptistChurchofCharlotte>

These videos also serve as a resource for Study leaders, as well as others.

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