



The United Methodist Church  
General Board of Church & Society

# Immigrant Welcoming Communities

*Building Teams for a Justice Journey*



Don't mistreat any foreigners who live in your land. Instead, treat them as well as you treat citizens and love them as much as you love yourself. Remember, you were once foreigners in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God."  
—Leviticus 19:33-34 (CVE)

## Become an Immigrant Welcoming Community

The United Methodist Church affirms the worth, dignity and inherent value and rights of every person regardless of their nationality or legal status. Welcoming immigrants is not only an act of mission; it is an opportunity to receive God's grace. The United Methodist Church understands that at the center of Christian faithfulness to Scripture is the call we have been given to love and welcome the sojourner.

We invite United Methodist churches

to journey together to become Immigrant Welcoming Communities living out our faith into action. Becoming an Immigrant Welcoming Community is a journey open to entire congregations or to individual classes, United Methodist Women units, Wesley Founda-

tions, youth groups, or other smaller groups within congregations.

Whatever size the community that decides to enter into this journey, the purpose is to deepen and widen the involvement of United Methodists building welcoming communities and working for immigrant justice.

We want to invite people to deepen their understanding and build relationships based on mutuality and love. The journey is about moving forward in a process within your class, unit, group, community or entire congregation and, with the support of other communities in your region, to expand the network of faith communities who are a public moral voice for building welcoming communities.

### 4 Steps

- 1 Understanding and Articulating Our Faith
- 2 Building Incarnational Relationships
- 3 Education for Transformation
- 4 Prayerful Witness and Affirming our Covenant

## Goals of the Journey to Become an Immigrant Welcoming Community

- To build welcoming communities for newly arriving immigrants based on loving, mutual, reciprocal, egalitarian relationships.
- This journey will provide an opportunity for local United Methodists to build a long-term sustainable movement to defend and support the rights of immigrants.
- By participating in this journey, you will be equipped to travel from mercy to justice, from service-only to incarnational friendship, from ministering to immigrants to being transformed alongside of immigrant communities.
- This journey offers communities opportunities for leadership development.

## Step 1: Understanding and Articulating Our Faith

To learn and deepen our knowledge of what Scripture says about hospitality, welcoming the immigrants, and moving from mercy to justice. What makes this journey a unique experience is the contextualized, in-house, and self-contained process in which our churches walk hand-in-hand with our immigrant communities sharing as brothers and sisters and impacting our society with the fulfillment of our mission to “make disciples for the transformation of the world.”

### Goals

- Learn about the pervasive theme of hospitality throughout the Bible.
- Embrace the calling all Christians have to justice ministries.
- Know what United Methodists say about immigration (Social principles, Resolutions).

### Options for learning events or actions:

#### 1. Bible study on immigration from faith perspective:

- See the Bible study activity “Thinking Biblically about Immigration” developed at Church and Society.

#### 2. Host film screening of “Jasmine’s Story,” and discussion on how our faith calls us to welcome the immigrant among us:

<http://rethinkchurch.org/article/immigration>.

Jasmine Franco is a 19-year-old college student studying to become a doctor. She made the dean’s list both fall and winter semesters last year, and works part-time helping immigrant workers at a student-run organization.

- A DVD of “Jasmine’s Story” can be obtained by contacting:  
Jenia Ree Moore, [jmoore@umcjustice.org](mailto:jmoore@umcjustice.org).

#### 3. In addition to hosting the Bible study and screening of Jasmine’s story, we encourage you to lift up immigrants in scripture readings, prayers, liturgy or sermons during worship service.

Other resources: The United Methodist Social Principles, *Book of Resolutions*, and Our Social Creed.

## Step 2: Building Incarnational Relationships

Learn that the roots of building a movement for justice for immigrants are incarnational relationships. Depending on your context, this may take many different forms, but getting to know people directly affected by the issue is central to moving forward in the journey. We invite you to organize at least two of the following activities.

### Goals

- Build relationships of mutuality and respect grounded in love for one another in the journey of building the Beloved Community.
- Start to build bridges between immigrant communities and non-immigrants in your class, unit, Wesley Foundation, youth group or entire congregation by creating a personal connection to the issue between your community and an immigrant youth or family.
- Map out the community you are in and the immigrant communities they serve, by listing all of the ministries members are involved in and see which ones impact immigrant communities.

### Options for learning events or actions:

#### 1. Host a “Cultural Potluck” among the members of your community along with another community. Share food and cultural traditions from members of the congregation and partner with other communities or congregations nearby or who share space in your building. It can be a large dinner or a small breakfast with lots of time for discussion and sharing.

Resources about how to put together a cultural potluck can be obtained by contacting: Jenia Ree Moore at [jmoore@umcjustice.org](mailto:jmoore@umcjustice.org).

#### 2. Organize a group of people from your congregations to participate in a volunteer opportunity that works with immigrants in your community and then organize a group reflection after the experience:

- English for Speakers of Other Languages classes.
- Justice For Our Neighbors (JFON) or a nearby immigration legal clinic.
- Tutoring or after-school programs.
- Day-laborers or farm-worker ministries.

## Step 3: Education for Transformation

Education that leads to incarnational relationships and engagement is key to bringing about transformation in our churches and all society. For this step it is important to understand that there is a wealth of information about various aspects of immigration and the learning process is never over. We should find opportunities of education throughout the course of the journey and these are just some beginning steps.

### Goals

- Broaden the base of your immigration ministry by including other communities or your congregation as a whole in your transformational education.
- Invite new participants to the movement through educational events.
- Deepen your understanding of the issue of immigration and the challenges immigrants face every day.
- Continue to create a personal connection to immigrants by involving the stories of immigrants in all educational engagement.

### Options for learning events or actions:

1. **Have a guest speaker** to your community or possibly a panel discussion with immigrant rights advocates and community leaders, including youths or families directly impacted by immigration.

Possible speakers could include:

- Justice for Our Neighbor attorney or board member who can share the complexity of current immigration law and can provide an invitation for members of your community to participate in JFON's ministries.
  - Undocumented student sharing his or her testimony.
  - Someone who has been in immigration detention or who has had a family member deported.
  - Immigrant rights advocate talking about ways to support local campaigns.
  - Mental health professionals talking about the effects of being undocumented on the immigrants community.
2. **Host a film screening** followed by a testimony of someone directly affected by the broken immigration system, and have a group discussion. (For possible film titles visit: <http://crln.org/films>.)
  3. **Host a gathering** where participants share their immigration stories (include family affected, immigration activist, mental health professionals).

## Step 4: Prayerful Witness and Affirming Our Covenant

This is a time of celebration, a time to honor the core group of leaders who helped lead the process; to bless, affirm the commitment of the entire community to become an immigrant welcoming community. Invite other congregations and communities to join you as you begin your lifelong journey.

### Goals

- Create a powerful experience for the congregation to publically witness their commitment to immigrants.
- Understand that societal transformation happens when our faith becomes public.
- Identify areas for deeper growth and learning; plan how to both continue to teach this new learning and translate this into action.
- Identify your witness with the witness happening in other United Methodist congregations.
- Assume a prophetic role in connecting and reconciling immigrants, dominant culture, and those in places of public power.

### Options for learning events or actions:

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. (*To get a guide on how to set up a prayer vigil, contact Jeania Ree Moore, [jmoore@umcjustice.org](mailto:jmoore@umcjustice.org).*)
2. **Bless the community's ongoing ministry** on this issue; create a moment when the community makes a sacred commitment to continue to welcome immigrants. (*To get a sample covenant and celebration order of worship, contact Jeania Ree Moore, [jmoore@umcjustice.org](mailto:jmoore@umcjustice.org).*)
3. **Organize a Neighbor to Neighbor visit** to meet and establish a relationship with your elected representatives. (*For a copy of "How to Organize for a Just & Humane Immigration Reform," contact Jeania Ree Moore at [jmoore@umcjustice.org](mailto:jmoore@umcjustice.org).*)
4. **Locate an immigration court** nearby, witness the court proceedings, and have a discussion afterwards.
5. **We invite one or two leaders from your community to join the UMC Rapid Response Teams** to unite with other United Methodists committed to defending and supporting the rights of immigrants, and to find new ways to your journey on being an Immigrant Welcoming Community.

**Step 1:**  
*Understanding and Articulating Our Faith*

Learn and deepen our knowledge of what Scripture says about hospitality, welcoming immigrants and moving from mercy to justice. This is the beginning of the journey, a time to ground ourselves in our sacred scriptures and recognize the human dignity of our immigrant brothers and sisters.

**Step 2:**  
*Building Incarnational Relationships*

Learn that the roots of building a movement for justice for immigrants are incarnational relationships. Depending on your context, this may take many different forms, but getting to know people directly affected by the issue is central to moving forward in the journey.

**Step 3:**  
*Education for Transformation*

Education that leads to incarnational relationships and engagement is key to bringing about societal transformation. For this step it is important to understand that there is a wealth of information about various aspects of immigration and the learning process is never over.

**Step 4:**  
*Prayerful Witness and Affirming Our Commitment*

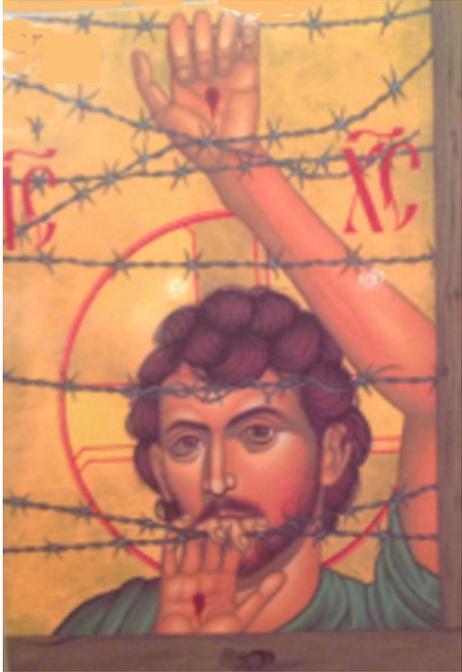
Prayerful witness offers a public way to be relationally present with immigrant communities. This is a time of celebration, a time to honor the core group of leaders who helped lead the process, celebrate the entire community's commitment and to invite other communities within your church or other congregations to join you as you begin your lifelong journey.

## How Becoming an Immigrant Welcoming Community Works

The journey toward becoming an Immigrant Welcoming Community is lifelong. Our process toward becoming an Immigrant Welcoming Community and beginning this lifelong journey takes just four steps.

For each step, your class, unit, Wesley Foundation, youth group, UMW or entire congregation will commit to the following:

- **A learning event or action** that can, and often should include participation from a nearby immigrant congregation or community group. These events can take place on Sunday mornings, or at other times. There are often multiple options with each step, so more than one learning event or action can be planned.
- **A time of reflection** on what you learned from the event or action.
- **A time of planning** for the next event or action as well as how to include other communities in your congregations, or other congregations.



**For more information:**

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**CHURCH & SOCIETY**  
The United Methodist Church

Living **FAITH** Seeking **JUSTICE** Pursuing **PEACE**