

**COMPREHENSIVE  
IMMIGRATION REFORM  
TOOLKIT**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

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Most people will agree that the immigration system is broken as evidenced by the long processing times, number of undocumented immigrants in the US, and limited number employment based immigration admissions for both low-skill and specialized professions, like computer engineers and scientists. Discussions about how to improve the response and efficiency of the immigration process is typically labeled “Comprehensive Immigration Reform.”

The phrase, “comprehensive immigration reform” reflects the need for the entire the immigration system to be overhauled. Some media and politicians refer to such measures as “amnesty.” This mix of reform with amnesty is, in part, the result of the Immigration Control and Reform Act of 1986, signed into law by President Ronald Reagan. Whenever immigration reform is reported in the media, reference and comparisons to this law often follow. While an in-depth review of the 1986 law is beyond the scope of this packet, we include referrals for more information and opinions on why the legislation failed to meet its goals. This differentiation is an important part of moving forward on real immigration reform that meets the needs of our country and immigrant families.

On June 22, 2011, U.S. Senators Robert Menendez (D-NJ), Harry Reid (D-NV), Patrick Leahy (D-VT), Dick Durbin (D-IL), Chuck Schumer (D-NY) John Kerry (D-MA) and Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) re-introduced a comprehensive immigration reform bill aimed at addressing the broken immigration system. Visit Senator Menendez’s website for a full press release, <http://menendez.senate.gov/newsroom/press/release/?id=0c6c73f2-5366-4fde-bd9d-4e5d85c1b8f3>.

This packet of information will help you understand current immigration policy and help you lead discussions on what changes need to be included in any comprehensive immigration reform.

## **THE ISSUE**

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In the United States everyone fits into one of four categories: citizen, immigrant, non-immigrant, or undocumented. While we hear most often about citizens and undocumented individuals, the other categories and the process of gaining permission to enter the US are an important part of the discussion.

### *Immigration Categories*

This is a very brief overview of the immigration categories and requirements for each. For more detailed information, consider asking an immigration attorney or other immigration professional to come speak to your community. Please feel free contact the Office of Immigration Issues if you are considering a program on immigration policy basics for guidance on choosing a speaker.

**Citizen:** A citizen is a person who has either been born in the US or has been “naturalized.” The process for naturalization includes fulfilling a requirement for continuous presence in the US for a specific period of time, learning English and US history/civics, and paying application fees. For information on the citizenship process, visit the US Citizenship and Immigration Services website at [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov) and click on “citizenship.”

**Immigrant:** A person who has sought and received permission to enter the US in order to make the US his/her home, he/she is also known as having a “green card” or being “lawful permanent resident.” An immigrant will receive a social security number and permission to reside and work in the US. Most often, the potential immigrant has a sponsor and that sponsor and that person is a family member or employer. The person’s sponsor must complete paperwork and pay the fees and then in many cases, wait – sometimes years – until a visa is available. To determine wait/processing times, immigration attorneys, employers, and families refer to the Visa Bulletin released each month by the US Department of State (please see below for more information).

The US also provides immigrant status to a limited number of individuals through the refugee and asylee programs and the diversity lottery. To qualify as a refugee the person must be in a country outside their country of usual residence and be unable to return there due to persecution limited to one of five categories: race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion. The refugee and asylees programs are rather specialized. To learn more about refugees, visit <http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/pda/refugee-ministries/>.

The diversity lottery sets aside 55,000 visas for individuals from countries without large immigrant populations in the US. This limits the people who qualify for these visas so people from Mexico, India, Philippines and other countries do not qualify. The 55,000 names are chosen randomly after a period of enrollment. In 2011 during the 60 day enrollment period 12.1 million qualified individuals enrolled to win one of the 55,000 visas. For more information on the diversity lottery, please visit: [http://travel.state.gov/visa/immigrants/types/types\\_1322.html#6](http://travel.state.gov/visa/immigrants/types/types_1322.html#6).

**Non-immigrant:** A person who has sought and received permission to enter the US for a specific period time for a specific purpose is considered a non-immigrant. The most common non-immigrant visa is a tourist visa. A non-immigrant must not have the intention to remain in the US indefinitely and only remain in the US for the specific reason, then leave by the date that his/her visa expires.

**Undocumented:** A person is undocumented if she/he enters the US “without authorization” or “without inspection.” While there is the perception that undocumented individuals sneak undetected across a port of entry, most research shows that anywhere from 40% to over half of undocumented people in the US overstayed a visa. This means that they received permission to enter the US, as a student or tourist, etc., but did not leave when their visa expired.

### *The Visa Bulletin*

The US Department of State each month releases the Visa Bulletin on their website, [http://travel.state.gov/visa/bulletin/bulletin\\_1360.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/bulletin/bulletin_1360.html). The Bulletin lists processing times for immigrant admissions to the US. A portion of the July 2011 Visa Bulletin is posted below for illustration purposes, but please see the website above for an explanation of categories and other information.

<b>Family-Sponsored</b>	<b>All Chargeability Areas Except Those Listed</b>	<b>CHINA-mainland born</b>	<b>INDIA</b>	<b>MEXICO</b>	<b>PHILIPPINES</b>
<b>F1</b>	01MAY04	01MAY04	01MAY04	08MAR93	15APR96
<b>F2A</b>	22MAR08	22MAR08	22MAR08	15FEB08	22MAR08
<b>F2B</b>	01JUL03	01JUL03	01JUL03	22SEP92	22SEP00
<b>F3</b>	15JUL01	15JUL01	15JUL01	15NOV92	22MAR92

**First (F1):** Unmarried Sons and Daughters of **U.S. Citizens:** 23,400 plus any numbers not required for fourth preference.

**Second:** Spouses and Children, and Unmarried Sons and Daughters of **Permanent Residents:** 114,200, plus the number (if any) by which the worldwide family preference level exceeds 226,000, plus any unused first preference numbers:

**A. (F2A)** Spouses and Children of Permanent Residents: 77% of the overall second preference limitation, of which 75% are exempt from the per-country limit;

**B. (F2B)** Unmarried Sons and Daughters (21 years of age or older) of Permanent Residents: 23% of the overall second preference limitation.

**Third (F3):** Married Sons and Daughters of **U.S. Citizens:** 23,400, plus any numbers not required by first and second preferences.

**Example:** If you are a citizen of India and marry a lawful permanent resident, your spouse will need to complete paperwork, pay the fee, and apply for permission for you to enter the US so that your new family can live in the US. When the paperwork is approved, which can take anywhere from a couple months to 8 or 9 months, you and your spouse will get an approval notice then the government will inform you that they are currently processing paperwork that was filed on March 22, 2008 (please see above chart, "India 2A", which is the category for spouse and minor children of people with green cards). So in 2011, you will need to wait over three years to receive the necessary paperwork for you to enter the US and live here with your spouse.

The employment based visa bulletin works in the same way, please explore the website at [http://travel.state.gov/visa/bulletin/bulletin\\_1360.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/bulletin/bulletin_1360.html) to learn about the processing times for employment based immigration which, depending on your skill level can be even longer. However, for employment-based immigration, the employer must complete more paperwork to show that there is no US worker to take the position being offered.

There is a downloadable "map" available on line that offers further information on this process in an easy to understand illustration.

<http://reason.org/files/a87d1550853898a9b306ef458f116079.pdf>.

## **Historical information and analysis of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986**

National Public Radio presented an article on the 1986 Immigration reform that includes interviews with one of the bill's sponsors and President Reagan's speech writer about why the legislation failed to meet its goals.

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=128303672>.

The Migration Policy Institute produced a report in 2005 entitled, Lessons from the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. The report can be accessed at,

[http://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/PolicyBrief\\_No3\\_Aug05.pdf](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/PolicyBrief_No3_Aug05.pdf).

## **Presbyterian policy on comprehensive immigration reform**

The 216th General Assembly (2004) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) adopted a resolution that set forth the elements of a just immigration policy that meets the needs our country and immigrants. A portion of the policy is printed below (to access the resolution visit:

<http://oga.pcusa.org/immigration/pdf/immigration-resolution-2006.pdf>):

Challenge each Presbyterian congregation and presbytery to embrace a comprehensive approach to "advocacy and welcome" for immigrants that includes, at the very minimum:

- a. an opportunity for hard-working immigrants who are already contributing to this country to come out of the shadows, regularize their status upon satisfaction of reasonable criteria, and, over time, pursue an option to become lawful permanent residents and eventually United States citizens;
- b. reforms in our family-based immigration system to significantly reduce waiting times for separated families who currently wait many years to be reunited;
- c. the creation of legal avenues for workers and their families who wish to migrate to the U.S. to enter our country and work in a safe, legal, and orderly manner with their rights fully protected; and
- d. border protection policies that are consistent with humanitarian values and with the need to treat all individuals with respect, while allowing the authorities to carry out the critical task of identifying and preventing entry of terrorists and dangerous criminals, as well as pursuing the legitimate task of implementing American immigration policy.
- e. a call for living wages and safe working conditions for workers of United States-owned companies in other countries;
- f. a call for greater economic development in poor countries to decrease the economic desperation, which forces the division of families and migration.

The Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2011 encompasses many of these elements. Please see the separate handout which outlines the Act, included in this packet.

# **COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM QUIZ**

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Often the public receives information about immigration in the United States in sound bites, which are released by the media and elected officials. Unfortunately, this can create the impression that immigration law is simple or easy to understand. Often people might believe they understand more about the immigration system than they really do. Presenting a quiz in a non-threatening and fun way can help shed light on the realities of U.S. immigration law and prompt discussion. This is especially helpful when first starting your conversation.

This sample quiz, with the answer key, can help break down pre-conceived notions about immigration law and issues and open people to receiving reliable and trustworthy information on policy and the faith response to immigration in the US.

**1.) U.S. immigration law was last overhauled in \_\_\_\_.**

- a) 1889      b) 1938      c) 1955      d) 1996      e) 2002

**2.) If you're not a citizen of the US, you're undocumented.**

True \_\_\_\_      False \_\_\_\_

**3.) Currently, there are \_\_\_\_ permanent immigrant visas available for low-skill workers, for example farmer workers and landscapers, available for the whole country every year.**

- a) 5,000      b) 10,000      c) 25,000      d) 55,000      e) 100,000

**4.) If you are a legal permanent resident (you have a green card) and you marry a citizen of the Philippines, your spouse will wait \_\_\_\_ year(s) to receive a valid visa to enter the U.S.**

- a) 1      b) 2      c) 4      d) 8      e) 15

**5.) If you have a US citizen child (a child born in the US) but you are undocumented, you can stay in the U.S.**

True \_\_\_\_      False \_\_\_\_

**6.) If you're a business owner who builds roofs and while on vacation in Mexico this week you meet a Mexican citizen who you want to hire, you can complete the paperwork and have your new employee in the US \_\_\_\_.**

- a) By the end of this year      b) in 1 year      c) in 3 years      d) in 6 years      e) in 8 years

**7.) In the US \_\_\_\_% of children live in a household where at least one parent is undocumented.**

- a) 1.5      b) 2.8      c) 7      d) 8.9

## **COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM QUIZ ANSWERS**

- 1) D, 1996. While administrative changes are made to immigration law on what seems like a daily basis, Congress made its most recent reform of the immigration structure in 1996 with the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA). In 2002 Congress abolished the INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service) when it created the Department of Homeland Security but even then significant changes to IIRIRA did not occur.
- 2) False. Immigration law is quite complex and while the media typically reports most often on citizenship and undocumented immigrants, all people in the US fit into one of four status categories set out by congress. Citizen – born or naturalized. Non-immigrant – in the US for a specific period time for a specific purpose without the intention of making the US your home. Immigrant – in the US and intend to make the US your home. Undocumented – in the US without authorization. People can become undocumented either by crossing a border without permission or coming on a valid visa with permission then violating a condition of their visa or overstaying their visa.
- 3) A, 5,000. That is right, 5,000 low skill employees may be granted permission to enter the US each year. In the past this number was 10,000 but since 2002 the number has been reduced to account for people admitted under another program.
- 4) D, 8 years. There is the impression among the American public that if an immigrant marries a US Citizen or lawful permanent resident that that person automatically becomes a US citizen or lawful permanent resident. Every month the US State Department releases a visa bulletin that notifies the public of processing times on family and employment sponsored visas. The answer to this question was based on the bulletin released in July 2011. If a green card holder completed the paperwork to bring his/her spouse to the US, that family would need to wait 8 years before being united. In fact because of this issue, the spouse in the Philippines would most likely not be permitted to get a visa to just visit the US because of his/her marriage to a person in the US. For information on the visa bulletin visit, [http://www.travel.state.gov/visa/bulletin/bulletin\\_5489.html](http://www.travel.state.gov/visa/bulletin/bulletin_5489.html).
- 5) False. Having a US citizen child does not give an undocumented person any right to stay in the US. While US citizens can “sponsor” their parents so that their parents can come to the US, that child must be at least 21 years old and the parent must be admissible to the US. A person who has accumulated more than 180 days of unauthorized presence in the US cannot apply for permission to enter the US for 3 years. If the person has accumulated over 1 year of unauthorized presence, they are barred from the US for 10 years.
- 6) D, 6 years. An employer must complete a lot of paperwork to petition to bring a non-US worker to the US for work. This is designed to protect US workers, rightly so. The employer must demonstrate that NO US worker has applied for the job, if one does the employer cannot hire the person the employer would like to bring to the US. After completing the appropriate paperwork and if the paperwork is approved, the employer will still need to wait 6 years before bringing the employee from Mexico to the US. That means during this time the employer will not have that position filled. For more information see the answer to number 4.
- 7) C, 7%. A recent report found that 7% of children in the US lived in a household where at least one parent was undocumented. To see the report visit, <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/125.pdf>. What impact might this have on children and their school work?

# **HOST A MOVIE NIGHT**

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Hosting a movie night is a fun and casual way to bring people together. Some people would attend a movie night even though they might be intimidated or uninterested in a speaker's forum or Bible study. A movie night is both social, which allows for fellowship and relationship building before tackling a difficult issue, and educational. Choosing the right film to start discussion on a specific issue related to immigration is crucial.

This information includes a movie recommendation as well as tips and planning advice to ensure you create an informal and open environment.

## **Under the Same Moon, PG-13**

Official website: <http://www.foxsearchlight.com/underthesamemoon/>

*Nine-year-old Carlos aka Carlitos is one of the countless children left behind by parents who come to the U.S. seeking a way to provide for their families. His mother, Rosario, has worked illegally as a domestic in Los Angeles for four years, sending money home to her son and mother to give them a chance at a better life. When the death of his grandmother leaves young Carlitos alone, he takes his fate into his own hands and heads north across the border to find his mother. As he journeys from his rural Mexican village to the L.A. barrio, Carlitos faces seemingly insurmountable obstacles with a steely determination and unfettered optimism that earn him the grudging respect and affection of a reluctant protector, a middle-aged migrant worker named Enrique. The unlikely pair finds its way from Tucson to East L.A., but the only clue Carlitos has to his mother's whereabouts is her description of the street corner from which she has called him each Sunday for the last four years. Unaware that Rosario is only hours away from returning to Mexico to be with her son, Carlitos and Enrique desperately comb the vast unfamiliar city for a place he has seen only in his imagination.*

Christianity Today reviewed the movie in 2008 and wrote discussion questions, which can be viewed at: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/movies/reviews/2008/underthesamemoon.html>.

## **PRE-PLANNING:**

- Watch the movie with one or two people coordinating the event. Discuss the film and take notes about the areas of the film that you believe to be the most interesting to your group.
- Decide on a couple main points and focus your group's discussion on those main points
- Try to anticipate areas of concern and role play how to cope with dissent in your group
- Consider assigning a reading prior to the movie to give some structure to people's knowledge and conversation after the film.
- Coordinate a location, refreshments, equipment, and a moderator for your group
- Publicize your movie night: place announcements in your newsletter, request two minutes during a worship service to make an announcement, utilize email and social media used by your congregation, post flyers, and personally extend invitations.
  - For a flyer, consider printing the first page of the "press kit" from the 9500 Liberty website and then hand writing the details of your event including date, location, and time. Don't forget to tell people you'll serve refreshments!

## **THE NIGHT OF THE EVENT:**

- Set up the area in a manner that makes watching the film comfortable but which can be easily switched to a set up that is conducive to conversation.
- Arrive early to set up the film, test the equipment, and set out refreshments.
- Print enough sign in sheets (included in this packet) so that you can capture the contact information of those in attendance so that you can follow up with a thank you email and extend an invitation to further discuss immigration issues.
- Designate a time for discussion – set a time frame that will allow people to contribute but be considerate of time limitation. Discussions could go on forever and people could leave without hearing the “what next” or wrap up. After a movie, no more than 30 minutes, including time for the leader to wrap up and extend an invitation for more conversation and learning.
  - Reserve 3-5 minutes at the end of the discussion to thank participants and to make a commitment to explore an aspect of immigration further through inviting a speaker, finding a Bible Study, or even watching another film.
- Consider utilizing the sample quiz. You can collect the quizzes and tally the answers then give the quiz again after further discussions to see how people’s perceptions change. It is not necessary that people identify themselves on the quiz.

## **FOLLOW UP**

- Create an excel spreadsheet and log the information from the sign-in sheets from the movie night.
  - If an individual would like to become more involved or get more information, considering contacting our office.
- Send a quick email thanking people for attending and urging them to continue in the conversation.
  - Sample email:
    - *Thank you for joining us last night for a viewing of \_\_\_\_\_. I hope that you found the film and following discussion helpful to developing your understanding immigration issues and how we as a community can respond. If you have comments to share, please reply to this e-mail. We plan to continue the discussion around immigration by \_\_\_\_\_ and I hope that you will join us in this effort. I will keep you posted on planning meetings and other events. I look forward to working with you on this important issue.*
- Write a paragraph that summarizes the movie night and following discussion to share with your congregation/community and extend an invitation for others to join your exploration of immigration issues.

## **DISCUSSING A FAITHFUL RESPONSE**

The Bible is a text rich with meaning and stories that help us interpret our lives with God and one another. The stories of our faith ancestors, though written in antiquity, can often ring true in our modern experience.

From the beginning of the Bible, it is the story of a people on the move. Adam and Eve are not in the Garden long before God sends them out of paradise but not without making them garments to protect them. Even Cain who killed his brother and was driven from the land by God was given God's mark of protection. There are many stories of God protecting and traveling with our faith ancestors as they travel, migrate, cross borders, and settle in a land with people who will not claim them as their own. The Bible is our sacred text and is more than a book about immigration but the themes of traveler, migrant, and settler are prominent.

Below are a few texts that will prompt discussion about our faith and how it relates to modern problems associated with immigration and public policy. You do not have to discuss all the verses at one time but may pick one or two appropriate for your group or use all of them at different times to open or close discussions. As reformed people, we believe that no part of our life is separate from God and we need God's guidance on understanding how to respond to stranger and neighbor.

All verses come from the New Revised Standard Version.

### **Luke 24: 13-35**

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him." Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Discussion: Why would Jesus choose to appear as a stranger? How does it feel to hear someone call Jesus a "stranger?" Who are the strangers in your community? Are you sometimes the stranger? How would life in your church be different if you walked beside the "strangers" in your community? How would you be recognized or identified? In breaking bread with the diverse people are our eyes opened to what Scripture says about us? About God?

### **Deuteronomy 24:17**

You shall not deprive a resident alien or an orphan of justice; you shall not take a widow's garment in pledge. Remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there;

therefore I command you to do this. When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be left for the alien,

the orphan, and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all your undertakings. When you beat your olive trees, do not strip what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphans, and the widow.

Discussion: Some people will argue that “immigration” was different at the time of the biblical writers, this may be true in some respects. While there were not immigration officials, in other ways immigration, immigration is similar. Immigrants throughout history have faced hostility in a new foreign land and perhaps arrived in their new home with few possessions. In what other ways is it the same? How does this difference, and similarity, affect these commandments? Are we leaving things for the alien, widow and orphan or are we stripping our trees bear? Why is the Bible concerned with these three classes (alien, widow, and orphan) of individuals? By remembering immigrants, what might those who are not immigrants receive in return? How do immigrants contribute to your community?

### **Deuteronomy 26:4-11**

When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the Lord your God, you shall make this response before the Lord your Gods: “A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, we cried to the Lord, the God of our ancestors; the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O Lord, have given me.” You shall set it down before the Lord your God and bow down before the Lord your God. Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the Lord your God has given to you and to your house.

Discussion: As people of faith in the US we have a double legacy as immigrants – we are a nation of immigrants and our faith ancestors were wandering Arameans. Should this impact our view of immigration and immigrants? Read this passage from the perspective of an immigrant then from the perspective of a US citizen by birth, does it change the way the passage feels? This passage affirms that God brings people to lands unknown to them, do you believe that God still sends people in this manner? Why or why not?

### **Psalms 39:12-13**

“Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry; do not hold your peace at my tears. For I am your passing guest, an alien, like all my forebears. Turn your gaze away from me, that I may smile again, before I depart and am no more.

Discussion: Often Christians think of themselves as a guest in this world as a way of affirming their citizenship in the kingdom of heaven. How does this passage reflect this notion? Should this come to bear on the immigration discussion? on our perceptions of immigrants and immigration?

### **For further discussion**

The 216th General Assembly (2004) approved a resolution calling for Comprehensive Legalization Program for Immigrants Living and Working in the United States with Study Guide. This packet can be downloaded at <http://www.pcusa.org/media/uploads/acswp/pdf/immigration-resolution.pdf>.

## **LEGISLATIVE ACTION**

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Advocating through our democratic process is a great way to affect change. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has a long history of advocating for justice in the laws that have an effect on immigrants and the way we do church. There is a time line you can explore on our website, [www.pcusa.org/immigration](http://www.pcusa.org/immigration). From the Indian Removal Act of 1830, to more recent efforts to defeat immigration legislation that created the potential for racial profiling in Kentucky, Presbyterians have often been front and center of the immigration debate.

Elected officials hear from constituents all the time and expect to receive calls from people who have not contacted their representatives with a request. While you may be nervous at first, you'll soon get comfortable.

Find out who represents you.

- Congressional representatives can be searched by visiting <http://www.congress.org/congressorg/directory/congdir.tt>. This website requires your zip + four (typically on your driver's license) but can quickly pull up your state and congressional representatives.
- If you would like more help on this, please contact our office at 888-728-7882 ext. 5007 or [melissa.gee@pcusa.org](mailto:melissa.gee@pcusa.org).

### **The Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2011 (S.1258)**

To track federal legislation, including vote history, bill text, and co-sponsors, visit:

<http://thomas.loc.gov/home/thomas.php>. Bills can be searched by key word or bill number.

Write a letter to your representatives

- While you may want to sound like an expert when you write to your representatives, the most important and valuable thing you can do is sound like an authentic human and voter. Talk about your values, thoughts, and what you witness in your community. Elected officials have easy access to the "facts" but not to what happens on the ground and how their constituents are impacted.
- Be polite in your tone. Remember that while your representatives may not always represent your views, they are nonetheless civil servants whom we should respect.
- Mention specific legislation by name or number and make "an ask." Be direct in telling your representative what you would like to see him or her do and why. i.e. "Please support the DREAM Act and become a co-sponsor because children should be able to work toward the hopes and dreams they have for their future."

Plan a visit to your representatives' offices

- Organize a delegation to visit your representatives or their district office. Plan thoughtfully about who should attend, which can vary depending on the issue you want to address. Consider taking a leader in the business community, clergy, immigrant or refugee, or tourism officials. Schedule a time for your group to get together to discuss who will talk and what your focus will be during the meeting. When deciding who should talk, be sensitive to issues related to power especially if the group is compromised of people of mixed immigration status yet the people who do all the talking are U.S. citizens.
- Stay on message. While you're visiting with your representative resist to the urge to also mention that "other" issue whether it is the budget, the pot holes on your street, or the war in Iraq. Educate the other members of your delegation about this too.
- Get your picture taken with the official and use it to publicize your visit. Elected officials will love this kind of publicity, especially if it is election time!
- Follow up with the official or his or her representative with a thank you letter. Include other information which may have come up in your visit. For example if the person is not aware of the topic you're speaking about, send them some information along with your thank you letter. If you have a question about resources, feel free to contact our office at [melissa.gee@pcusa.org](mailto:melissa.gee@pcusa.org) or 502-569-5007. If you publish news about the visit in your newsletter, be sure to send a copy to the district office.

## **HOST A SPEAKER**

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Inviting local immigration professionals, business leaders, social service providers, and immigrants to share their stories and expertise can help you gather information about immigration issues in your community and provide an opportunity for to ask questions. You can host a series of events or focus on one event at a time. However, for each speaker, focus on a particular issue rather than attempting to cover a broad collection of issues. This will allow for deeper discussion and understanding and be less frustrating to the speaker.

The following outline will help you organize and coordinate the event. Feel free to contact the Office of Immigration Issues if you would like referrals to speakers in your area.

- Meet with a couple people to evaluate the interest level in your community and brainstorm about possible topics.
- Decide which topic is most relevant to your needs and come up with a list of possible speakers.
  - Contact local non-profit organizations, the bar association, and immigrant churches to gather the names and contact information of possible speakers.
  - Meet with a couple of the speakers if no one in your group has experience with them to talk about your objectives and assess their appropriateness for your event.
- After choosing a speaker, determine the format of the event.
  - Ideally you should allow for one hour for the speaker to share information and then 30 minutes for questions and answers.
  - Decide if a meal or a reception should be included in your event.
  - Ask about the technology needs for the speaker, for example, a projector, large screen, microphone, etc.
- Consider opening the event to the public and sharing the information with other local congregations and faith-based organizations
  - Publicize the event: newsletters, Facebook, local radio stations, fliers, and e-mail listservs
- On the day of the event, arrive early to test the equipment and ensure the room is set up in an appropriate manner.
  - Have a sign in sheet so you can follow up with attendees.
- Follow up with attendees with a brief email and invite them to take action on a specific issue or join you in the larger effort to educate and advocate around immigration issues.
  - If you follow up more than once remember to be sensitive to people's time and in-box space. Sending items too often will result in your emails being deleted without being read. Make your updates meaningful but short by including links the recipient can access should she/he be interested in learning more.
- Follow up with the speaker with a note to thank him or her for speaking to your congregation and how your group plans to follow up the discussion.

## **DIRECT SERVICES PARTNERSHIP**

The wheels of justice can turn slowly, especially when relying on congressional action. Women gathered for the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 where they set forth the objective of securing the right to vote but the 19th amendment guaranteeing that right was not adopted until 1920, nearly a century had passed! Already in the US immigration reform has been debated for over a decade. While continuing to work within our democratic process, people of faith can undertake the task of education and direct service partnerships. This can help meet the immediate needs of a broken immigration system and prepare people for debate and discussions that are consistent with the gospel mandate to love our neighbor.

Direct service partnership requires the input and voice of your entire community. Whether you are an immigrant congregation or mostly non-immigrant congregation, working with people and organizations representing the breadth of diversity in your community is the best way to establish the resources and needs that exist. Below are examples of activities and programs for you to consider.

- Write a letter to the editor of your local paper in support of comprehensive immigration reform.
- Create and print bumper stickers or lapel pins advocating for comprehensive immigration reform.
- Buy billboard space or radio ads, or create public service announcements in support of comprehensive immigration reform.
- Help change the tone of the immigration debate in your community by responding to negative stereotypes of immigrants.
- Find allies in your state. Call the presbytery office to find the name and contact information for immigrant churches in your Presbytery, seek out immigrant and civil rights based non-profit organizations, and contact the state council of churches.
- Ask your Presbytery office if the presbytery has an immigration task force. If so, they can help you to get involved. If not, consider working to establish a task force in your presbytery. You can call the Office of Immigration Issues for help on this issue and view the packet entitled, "How to start an immigration taskforce in your presbytery" available on-line or through our office.
- Make immigration a priority for an upcoming Presbytery meeting by hosting a meal and speaker, preparing hand-out materials, and coordinating an information booth. The Office of Immigration Issues has materials for education and worship to help you introduce members of your presbytery to immigration issues. An event like this can help identify allies interested in working on or starting an immigration task force.
- Learn about and support proposed legislation that would provide in-state tuition for immigrant students as well as other pro-immigrant bills. Monitor the website for your state legislature for immigration legislation.
- Keep track of state immigration legislation through the Office of Immigration Issues website: <http://oga.pcusa.org/immigration/getinformed.htm>. The Office tracks state legislation and provides links to legislative history and the bill text.
- Consider holding a series of workshops or events that educate people in your community about their legal rights, how to prepare for a raid, or the impacts of local immigration laws and ordinances. The Office of Immigration Issues has a Family Care Plan available on-line to help immigrant families prepare for the possible detention of a loved one. Download the packet at <http://oga.pcusa.org/immigration/getinformed.htm>.
  - The NILC (National Immigration Law Center) website has community education materials on these types of programs, visit: <http://www.nilc.org/ce/ceindex.htm#know-rights>.
- Evaluate the possibility of starting a legal clinic, detention visitation program, or other services.
  - Contact our office at [julia.thorne@pcusa.org](mailto:julia.thorne@pcusa.org) or 888-782-7882 ext. 5372 for inquires on legal clinics.
  - For information detention visitation programs, view the packet on our website or contact Anna Campbell with the National Network Coordinator, Access to Justice at 410-230-2838 or [acampbell@lirs.org](mailto:acampbell@lirs.org).
  - Coordinate citizenship and civic classes for refugees and immigrants preparing to become US citizens. US Citizenship and Immigration Services has developed a tool kit that your congregation can use to assist individuals preparing to naturalize. For more information visit <http://www.citizenshiptoolkit.gov/>.
- Join Presbyterians for Just Immigration (PFJI) to connect with Presbyterians across the country working on immigration issues, to keep abreast of current trends, and receive updates from the Office of Immigration Issues.
- "Like" PFJI's Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/#!/pages/Presbyterians-for-Just-Immigration/354161945856>.

## **RESOURCES**

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It is often difficult to know where to find accurate and responsible material. The staff at the Office of Immigration Issues read many articles, reports, and policies to create our resources and stay on top of immigration policy changes to be sure the work conforms with the policy adopted by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). As a result, we are aware that some organizations are known to properly research and cite their work.

### **Christians for Comprehensive Immigration Reform (CCIR), [www.faithandimmigration.org](http://www.faithandimmigration.org)**

CCIR is a coalition of Christian organizations, churches, and leaders from across the theological and political spectrum, united in support of comprehensive U.S. immigration reform. This coalition is working together to see fair and humane immigration reform enacted in Congress this year. The website includes resources such as a toolkit for organizing in your community.

### **American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA), <http://www.aila.org/>**

The website has resources on legal issues, including position statements on current proposed legislation, advocacy resources, and a search option for immigration attorneys.

### **Catholic Legal Immigration Network, [www.cliniclegal.org/](http://www.cliniclegal.org/)**

CLINIC has information and resources related to legal services for immigrants.

### **The Migration Policy Institute, [www.migrationpolicy.org](http://www.migrationpolicy.org)**

The Migration Policy Institute studies global migration, including migration in and to the United States. The website includes many recent reports on immigration and border policy

### **The Immigration Policy Center, [www.immigrationpolicy.org](http://www.immigrationpolicy.org)**

The Immigration Policy Center has created valuable information on state immigration legislation and completed a report for states considering immigration legislation.

<http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/special-reports/qa-guide-state-immigration-laws>.

### **Interfaith Immigration Coalition (IIC), <http://www.interfaithimmigration.org/>**

The Interfaith Immigration Coalition (IIC) is a partnership of faith-based organizations committed to enacting fair and humane immigration reform that reflects our mandate to welcome the stranger and treat all human beings with dignity and respect. Coalition members work together to advocate for just and equitable immigration policies, educate faith communities, and serve immigrant populations around the country. Through this coalition, hundreds of national and local faith-based organizations and faith leaders have called on Congress and the Administration to enact immigration reform consistent with these values. The website provides information on their programs and stories of immigrants.