

AMMPARO

Accompanying Migrants with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities

Bible Study on Refugees and Migrants

Special thanks to Pastor Alexander Jacobs, Milwaukee, Wis., who authored the original manuscript and has given ELCA AMMPARO permission to edit and post it as a resource for all.

Purpose

To explore the perspective of Scripture on refugees and migrants.

Before the conversation starts, we agree that

- Immigration is a complex issue.
- There are strongly held, differing opinions among us.
- We will seek to understand how best to serve.
- We will speak respectfully about immigrants and migrants but also about those who enforce immigration law.

Quick biblical examples

- Israel began with refugees — Abraham and Sarah's family.
- Jesus began his life as a refugee in Egypt (according to Matthew).
- Adam and Eve are forced out of the Garden of Eden.
- Noah builds an ark to take refuge from the flood.

Facts

- At the end of World War II, one in every five refugees was Lutheran.
- Not all people on the move are immigrants.
- People arrive in the United States through a variety of circumstances. They may be refugees, asylum-seekers, temporary workers or visitors. People in each circumstance must go through a different process to be documented.
- It *is* *lawful* to provide human care to a person who lacks documentation.
- You are *not* required to report someone who lacks documentation.
- It is *not* lawful to help someone avoid compliance with immigration law, such as an order of deportation.
- Being undocumented is a criminal offense.

Don't leave anyone behind. Make sure everyone participating has the background information needed to participate.

Immigration terms

Refugees are people who fled their home country due to persecution or fear of persecution based on their race, religion, nationality, political opinions or membership in a particular social group. Refugees typically stay in camps in a safer country before being resettled in a third country. The process usually takes years. (*Lopez Lomong, a middle-distance runner who represented the United States in the 2008 Olympic Games, is a former refugee from Sudan.*)

Asylum-seekers are people forced to flee their homeland without access to the refugee resettlement process. To be eligible for asylum in the United States, such people must apply within one year of their arrival. Those who receive asylum are called asylees. (*Author and Nobel laureate Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn sought asylum in the United States after he was exiled from the Soviet Union.*)

Immigrants are people who have been admitted to live permanently in the United States as lawful permanent residents (LPRs). (*Most U.S. citizens have immigrant ancestors.*)

Nonimmigrants are people who are permitted to enter the United States for a limited period. Most nonimmigrants must apply for a visa before entry. Visa holders must also pass an immigration inspection upon arrival. (*Examples of nonimmigrants include students, tourists, temporary workers, business executives, diplomats, artists, entertainers and reporters.*)

Visas are travel documents granted by consular officials. Visas do not guarantee entry into the United States. (*The number of temporary worker visas granted in the United States each year is 5,000. U.S. demand for foreign-born workers is about 500,000.*)

Undocumented immigrants are people living in the United States without the permission of the U.S. government. Undocumented immigrants enter the United States without being inspected by an immigration officer or by using false documents. A foreign-born person who entered the country with permission of the U.S. government can become undocumented by “overstaying” their temporary visa, or remaining here after it has expired.

Mixed-status families are those with one or more members who are not U.S. citizens. The noncitizen family members may or may not be documented. For example, a mixed-status family might comprise a U.S. citizen; that person’s spouse, who is an undocumented immigrant; and their U.S.-born children, who are also citizens.

Lawful permanent residents are foreign-born individuals granted permission to live in the United States indefinitely. Typically, they seek this status in one of three ways:

- *Family sponsorship.* Adult U.S. citizens can sponsor their foreign-born spouses, parents, children and siblings. Lawful permanent residents can sponsor their spouses, children under age 21 and unmarried adult children.

- *Employment sponsorship.* U.S. employers can sponsor individuals for specific positions when there is a demonstrated shortage of available high-skilled workers.
- *Diversity lottery.* Immigrants from certain countries can register for one of the 50,000 visas made available each year.

Naturalized citizens are people who have obtained U.S. citizenship through a process called naturalization. To qualify for naturalization, applicants must be legal permanent residents and meet these qualifications:

- They must have resided in the United States for five years (three years if they are married to a U.S. citizen) without having committed any serious crimes.
- They must show that they have paid their taxes and are of “good moral character.”
- They must demonstrate knowledge of U.S. history and government as well as an ability to understand, speak and write basic English.

Session 1: Hospitality

Open in prayer

Almighty and merciful Lord, we ask you to be with us in our conversation. Guide our words that we might help each other understand. Guide our hearts and minds that we might see through your eyes. In Jesus' name, amen.

Through the lens of Scripture

Listen to the passages below and record three words or phrases each brings to mind. Share your words/phrases with the group. What came to mind when you heard the passage?

Psalm 91

¹ You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, ² will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust." ³ For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence; ⁴ he will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler. ⁵ You will not fear the terror of the night, or the arrow that flies by day, ⁶ or the pestilence that stalks in darkness, or the destruction that wastes at noonday. ⁷ A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. ⁸ You will only look with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked. ⁹ Because you have made the Lord your refuge, the Most High your dwelling place, ¹⁰ no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent. ¹¹ For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. ¹² On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone. ¹³ You will tread on the lion and the adder, the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot. ¹⁴ Those who love me, I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name. ¹⁵ When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue them and honor them. ¹⁶ With long life I will satisfy them, and show them my salvation.

Matthew 25:34-36

³⁴ Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; ³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me."

Romans 13:1

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God.

Additional reading: *Recovering Hospitality*

Boundaries help define what a household, family, church, or community holds precious. However, the modern world is deeply ambivalent about boundaries and community. . . . Hospitality is fundamentally connected to place — to space bounded by commitments, values, and meaning. . . . Within much of the biblical tradition, there are tensions between living a distinctive life, holy to the Lord, and the command to welcome strangers. Their relationship is best understood through the theological framework of covenant — bonds of responsibility and faithfulness connecting guests, hosts, and God. Only in this context can we adequately understand the simultaneous practices of inclusion and separation. Faithful believers who practice hospitality understand themselves to be in a relationship with God whose worship requires holiness, a distinct identity, and attention to the needs of others. —*Christine Pohl, Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition, p. 136*

Read Genesis 12:1-10; 15:5-7, 12-16

Share your impressions of Abraham and Sarah. Do you think it was easy for them to leave their home and follow God?

Through your eyes

Break into small groups and share a story about a big move in your personal or family history.

- What fears did you or your ancestors experience?
- What acts of welcome or help did you or your ancestors receive?
- Would it be easy for you to leave your home and live as a foreigner? What would it take for you to pick up and leave everything? What would your response be to God if you were asked to do this?

Identify two or three fears and two or three acts of welcome from your small group and share them with the large group.

On a whiteboard, blackboard or sheet of poster board, record lists of fears and acts of welcome from each small group. Circle words that were used more than once.

Read Deuteronomy 26:5-11

What do you notice about the way God treats the oppressed? What do this and the previous texts tell us about our relationship to God, land/place, possessions/fruits of our labor, and other people?

Read I Kings 17:8-16 and II Kings 4:8-10

These stories of hospitality express a core value of God's people. Take some time to share stories of hospitality, both given and received.

Read Leviticus 19:33, Leviticus 23:22 and Deuteronomy 24:14-22

These “laws” show how care for the poor and alien is central to social justice, but the laws aren’t as applicable as they once were. How would you rewrite these laws, keeping the same central themes but making them something we can do in our daily lives? Are these new laws something you can commit to doing?

Close in prayer

Dear Lord, we praise your marvelous creation of people and the way you care for each one of us. You provide for us eternally through salvation in your Son, Jesus Christ. You provide for us daily in all our needs. Thank you for the opportunities you give to offer hospitality and care for the strangers in our midst. Help us to love our neighbor, without fear, through our words and actions. Grant us strength to serve according to your will. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Session 2: Who Is Your Neighbor?

Open in prayer

Source of life who is known by many names, over turner and illuminator of hearts, we gather with gratitude for the earth and all who journey in it.

We give thanks for the interconnectedness of all creation.

Source of justice who is known by many names, let us not swerve from the path of righteousness that leads to just and equitable relationships.

Open our eyes that we may see the immigrant and the undocumented alien, whose labor enables and sustains our living; the farm worker, the hotel worker, the line cook, the childcare provider, the health care worker.

Give us the will to leave behind the safety of our sanctuaries to become your living sanctuary and claim our place in the movement to transform creation, that our voice, our heart, our spirit will join the voice, heart and spirit of all who demand to live with respect, justice and peace.

Through the lens of Scripture

Read the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37.

- In verse 29 the lawyer asks Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?” In what ways is the parable a surprising answer to the question? Are there any restrictions or qualifications about neighbors?
- Identify three to five things the Samaritan did *not* do that are significant to our conversation about current U.S. immigration issues. Record the list on a whiteboard, blackboard or sheet of poster board.

Read Luke 1:68-79

Listen to the reading and record three words or phrases it brings to mind. Share your words/phrases with the group.

Additional reading: *Fields of Blood*

One of the most ubiquitous religious practices was the cult of community. In the premodern world, religion was communal rather than a private pursuit. People achieved enlightenment and salvation by learning to live harmoniously together. Instead of distancing themselves from their fellow humans as the warriors did, sages, prophets, and mystics helped people cultivate a relationship with and responsibility for those they would not ordinarily find congenial. They devised meditations that deliberately extended their benevolence to the ends of the earth; wished all beings happiness; taught their compatriots to revere the holiness of every single person; and resolved to find practical ways of assuaging the world’s suffering. ... In Paul’s churches, rich and poor were instructed to sit at the same table and eat the same food. ... The Eucharist was not a solitary communion with Christ but a

rite that bonded the political community.” —*Karen Armstrong, Fields of Blood: Religion and the History of Violence, p. 397*

Through your eyes

The passage just read states that community has become increasingly more important in religion, yet all humans seek a sense of belonging, whether in their faith community or with neighbors, coworkers or relatives.

- When is a time you met a new person or group of people?
- How did you meet the person or group?
- How did you get to know the person?
- In what ways, if any, did you help the newcomer?
- When was a time you were the newcomer?
- What were your fears? Joys?
- Was there someone that helped you?
- If so, how did that person helping you make you feel?

How do you think migrants and immigrants feel? Who is their community? Who helps and accompanies them? Here are some things you can do to help:

- Learn about the ELCA AMMPARO Strategy (“Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities”) at <http://www.elca.org/ammparo>.
- As a welcoming congregation, commit to (1) spiritually and pastorally accompanying migrants in your community, (2) providing physical accompaniment to court, ICE check-ins and community services, (3) praying for justice and (4) advocating for justice for migrants. Information and commitment form: <https://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Publicly-Engaged-Church/AMMPARO>.
- Join a Guardian Angel program and accompany migrant children and families through their immigration court process. These programs are the visible expression of our church’s ministry of presence in the lives of our women, men and children who are facing the unknown. Find more information at <https://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Publicly-Engaged-Church/AMMPARO>.
- [Join the ELCA Advocacy network.](#)

Read (1) Mark 2:15-17, (2) Matthew 5:43-48; 25:34-40 and (3) Luke 10:36-37; 14:12-14

How do these texts challenge our assumptions about others? About the structures and systems of society? What are the risks of showing mercy or getting involved in the needs of others?

Share a story of such a risk. Was there greater risk for you or for the person you were helping?

Read James 2:1-7, Hebrews 13:1-3 and Romans 12:14-21

What one word or phrase from the texts stands out for you? What are these texts calling you to do this week?

How does your congregation offer hospitality? How could your congregation offer hospitality to migrants and refugees? Are there other things your congregation could do? Which are realistic?

Close in prayer

See the closing prayer in Session 1.

Session 3: Making Change

Open in prayer

Creator God, open our eyes so we can see you in the eyes of our immigrant brothers and sisters, eyes downcast for having lived so long in the shadows, eyes challenging us to join them in the streets or picket lines, eyes lifted looking for the Christ light in us.

Compassionate God, who has come to dwell among us, open our ears to hear the cries of your children, children being separated from their parents, rounded up in raids, led to detention centers, silently giving up dreams.

God of justice, who crosses all boundaries, give us courage to resist, to say NO to unfair labor practices, to unjust laws and policies.

Give us the strength to stand with and for your inclusive love, the faith to believe that another world is necessary and possible. Amen.

Through the lens of Scripture

“Then [Jesus] said to them, ‘Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s’ (Matthew 22:21b).

In terms of immigration, what belongs to “the emperor” and what belongs to God? List three to five things on a whiteboard, blackboard or sheet of poster board.

If you are a U.S. citizen, you have responsibilities to “the emperor,” such as paying taxes and obeying laws. What privileges do you have? List three to five of these.

Read Micah 4:1-5, Romans 13:1-7, 1 Peter 2:13-17, Leviticus 19:34, Deuteronomy 24:17 and Isaiah 58:6-7

Listen to the readings and record three words or phrases that each passage brings to mind. Share these with the group.

Additional reading: *For Common Things*

The source of my mother’s work is, I think, the principle that understanding our dependences is a key to understanding our obligations. This means considering not only what we rely on for our own convenience, but what is required for the continued well-being of the achievements, practices, and values that we love most. Her efforts seem to me a reminder that working for what we love most is the furthest thing from self-indulgence or narcissism. It is sometimes a hard discipline, a reminder that the honest love of any good thing discomforts us so far as we find that thing neglected or despoiled around us. Her love of education has been a devotion to discomfort. ... Thinking back, I believe that this period of my mother’s life highlights an essential point: the aim that my father described as “making a corner of the world as sane as possible” means taking responsibility for what our love relies upon. —*Jedediah Purdy, For Common Things: Irony, Trust, and Commitment in America Today, p. 191ff*

Read Romans 13:1-7 and I Peter 2:11-17

What do these texts express about Christians in society? (Note that nowhere are we expected to “love” our state or nation — love is reserved for God and the neighbor.) Do you agree with this? Why or why not? What are the basic essentials for members of a just society? How far do we go in compromising these standards?

Read Mark 12:13-17 and Revelation 13:1, 5-8, 11-18

The same Roman Empire that was relatively just in Paul’s letter to the Romans had become increasingly demonic by the end of the first century A.D., when the Revelation to John was written (note the economic implications of verse 17). Resistance was called for. What are the limits of secular authority and Christian resistance?

Give examples of appropriate and inappropriate resistance in certain historical situations. Have you ever “resisted”?

Next steps

What actions can your congregation take to bring about justice for migrants and refugees? How can your congregation accompany migrants in your community as a welcoming congregation? How can your congregation accompany refugees? Take some time to brainstorm and review the resources on the following pages.

Close in prayer

See the closing prayer in Session 1.

Resources for Understanding and Engaging

- ELCA AMMPARO, www.elca.org/ammparo
- Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services, www.lirs.org

Get involved

Pray for the safety of migrant children and families on their journeys and for justice as they reach their destinations.

Become a welcoming congregation to accompany these children and families through their transition to life in the United States. Link to resource. www.elca.org/Resources/AMMPARO

Advocate for justice for migrant children and families. www.elca.org/Advocacy

Accompany migrant children and families through a Guardian Angel program as the physical presence of the church in the courtroom. <https://vimeo.com/157458987>

Give to AMMPARO to provide opportunities for children and families in Central America and the United States. <https://community.elca.org/ammparo-donation-form>

Personal stories

- <https://www.lirs.org/stories/>
- <https://www.iom.int/press-room/migrant-stories>
- <https://iamamigrant.org/stories>
- <https://time.com/longform/migrants/>
- <https://myimmigrationstory.com/>

More Scripture readings and faith-based articles

- <https://www3.nd.edu/~dgroody/Published%20Works/Other%20Articles/files/REFLECT1GROODY.pdf>
- If you and your congregation enjoyed taking part in this Bible study, join AMMPARO's 40-day "I Was a Stranger" Bible and prayer challenge. Here is the link to the printable bookmarks:
http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/AMMPARO_English_40_day_bookmark_4-up.pdf?_ga=2.161270388.894738151.1571683006-1326663093.1569509071
- Daniel G. Groody, "Crossing the Divide: Foundations for a Theology of Migration and Refugees," *Theological Studies* 70:
<https://www3.nd.edu/~dgroody/Published%20Works/Journal%20Articles/files/TSSeptember09Groody.pdf>
- "Be Not Afraid: Resources for Congregations & Immigrant Families Fractured by Fear," Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service:
https://www.lirs.org/assets/2474/bna_equipped_biblestudy.pdf
- Joan M. Manuskin, "Leader's Guide: Immigration and the Bible," United Methodist Women: <https://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/downloads/mission-study-immigration-and-the-bible-leader.pdf>
- https://www.ucc.org/justice_immigration_worship_index

Look for local resources (examples from Milwaukee, Wis., follow)

- International Institute of Wisconsin — www.iiwisconsin.org
- Lutheran Social Services of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan — www.lsswis.org
- Catholic Charities — www.ccmke.org
- Hmong-American Friendship Association — www.hmongamer.org
- Milwaukee Muslim Women’s Coalition — www.mmwconline.org
- Islamic Society of Milwaukee — www.ismonline.org

Many local organizations have speakers who can shed light on the current situation and on specific populations (e.g., Syrians, Iraqis, Congolese, etc.). They also have speakers who can interpret current legislation and policies.

For further reading (nonfiction)

- Christine Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999)
- Jedediah Purdy, *For Common Things: Irony, Trust, and Commitment in America Today* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999)
- Karen Armstrong, *Fields of Blood: Religion and the History of Violence* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014)
- Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996)
- Todd H. Green, *The Fear of Islam: An Introduction to Islamophobia in the West* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015)
- Sonia Nazario, *Enrique’s Journey: The Story of a Boy’s Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite With His Mother* (New York: Random House, 2006)
- Karen Gonzalez, *The God Who Sees: Immigrants, the Bible and the Journey to Belong* (Harrisonburg, Va.: Herald Press, 2019)
- Jacob Soboroff, *Separated: Inside an American Tragedy* (New York: William Morrow, 2020)
- Sonia Shah, *The Next Great Migration: The Beauty and Terror of Life on the Move* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2020)
- Jessica Goudeau, *After the Last Border; Two Families and the Story of Refuge in America* (New York: Viking, 2020)
- Jia Lynn Yang, *One Mighty and Irresistible Tide: The Epic Struggle Over American Immigration, 1924-1965* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2020)

For further reading (fiction)

- On undocumented children in the United States: Valerie Luiselli, *Lost Children Archive* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2019)
- On internment of Japanese Americans during World War II: Julie Otsuka, *When the Emperor Was Divine* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002)
- On Muslims in London: Leila Aboulela, *Minaret* (New York: Grove Press, 2005)
- On Afghanistan: Nadia Hashimi, *When the Moon Is Low* (New York: William Morrow, 2015)
- On Haiti: Edwidge Danticat, *Farming of Bones* (New York: Soho Press, 1998)
- On Iran: Laleh Khadivi, *The Walking* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013)
- On Vietnam: Kim Thuy, *Ru* (Toronto: Random House, 2012)