

American Baptist Churches USA

**PASTORAL,
PRACTICAL,
PROPHETIC, AND
PERSONAL**

**A Resource
on Immigration**



Produced by the Immigration Task Force of American Baptist Churches USA

April 2015

Photo credit: New Sanctuary Movement of Philadelphia, 2015



Pastoral, Practical, Prophetic, and Personal A Resource on Immigration

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Church World Service, 2015

Dear American Baptists,

Around the globe, war, famine, poverty, drug violence, and religious strife are forcing thousands to flee their homelands. Since the Second World War, American Baptists, through the American Baptist Home Mission Societies (women’s and general), have been in the forefront of the resettlement of refugees.

Even before then, American Baptists established Christian Centers to welcome immigrants entering the United States in the great waves of migration of the early twentieth century. Our role in ministries of compassionate resettlement was so large that it is commemorated on a plaque at Ellis Island.

For the past several years, ABC congregations have been welcoming refugees from Burma who are largely but not exclusively Baptists related to our two-hundred-year-long ministries in Burma. In addition, ABCUSA has responded to the violence within Burma, which has forced so many to leave, with a ministry of advocacy for religious and human rights in that country.

The growing religion-based violence in the Middle East is driving thousands—both Christians and Muslims—to seek refuge in the United States and elsewhere. Drug cartel-based violence in Latin America, together with endemic impoverishment, led to a wave of unaccompanied minors fleeing for their lives to the United States in the summer of 2014. How shall we respond?

In the United States, we also face the question of how we should respond to the thousands who have crossed our borders without documentation and are living among us, work-

ing and raising their families. Many are members of our churches. As we Baptist believers are faced with the political debate concerning this hot button issue, what faith resources do we have that will help us respond?

As general secretary, I have called together an Immigration Taskforce to assist American Baptists as we grapple with these issues. I am grateful for the participation of the team: Dr. Warren Stewart, pastor of First Institutional Baptist Church in Phoenix; Rev. Ray Schellinger, International Ministries missionary in Mexico; Rev. Salvador Orellana, American Baptist Home Mission Societies national coordinator of Intercultural Ministries; Rev. Sandra DeMott Hasenauer, associate executive director of American Baptist Women’s Ministries; and Rev. Dr. José Norat-Rodríguez, International Ministries area director of Ibero-America and the Caribbean.

This guide, written by American Baptists for American Baptists, is designed to help us explore as devoted disciples of Jesus what loving our neighbors and doing justice mean in these concrete but complex circumstances. In developing this guide, we will draw on biblical resources, the perspective of our international missionaries, our ongoing work in immigration and refugee resettlement through the American Baptist Home Mission Societies, and our rich educational network through American Baptist Women’s Ministries.

May this short course of study be a blessing to you.

Yours in Christ,
 Rev. Dr. A. Roy Medley
 General Secretary
 American Baptist Churches USA



Preface

by Dr. Warren Stewart

In 2006 a Latina community activist I had worked with on economic development, housing, health care, and public education issues twenty years earlier called me and asked if I would join her and others in the campaign for comprehensive immigration reform. I responded, “Of course, because it’s a justice issue.” From that time on I have been actively engaged in advocacy for just, compassionate immigration policy and practices in our nation. Getting my predominantly African American congregation on board wasn’t easy at first, but once I shared with them that treating immigrants in our midst well is a biblical mandate, both pastor and people of the First Institutional Baptist Church have been at the forefront of opportunity for mission and ministry.

Throughout the Bible, the Word of God calls for loving-kindness and consideration for resident aliens and foreigners in our midst, exhorting God-fearing people not to wrong or oppress them. A few of these passages are Exodus 23:9; Leviticus 19:33–34; Deuteronomy 24:14; Psalm 146:9; and Jeremiah 7:5–7. Jesus Christ himself, in Matthew 25:44–45, informs us that we will be judged by our God on how we welcome a stranger among us. We also learn from the Bible that *no* human beings are illegal or illegitimate no matter the color of their skin, the language they speak, or the country from which they come. These biblical truths guide our prayers, thoughts, and actions toward our immigrant brothers and sisters.

The lack of comprehensive immigration reform by the U.S. Congress has subjected a large percentage of immi-

grants living in our country, especially immigrants of color, to unjust and often inhumane living conditions. As a consequence, families have been split; working family providers have lost their jobs; children have become homeless; schools and churches have been adversely affected; men, women, and children who have become victims of crime are afraid to report those crimes to police; many small businesses have been shut; and countless citizens and noncitizens have been racially profiled. Our nation’s borders need better security to prevent undocumented immigrants from entering our country, especially drug traffickers, violent criminals, and foreign terrorists. We need a legitimate system for foreign workers who do not desire to become citizens to provide for labor needs going unmet by American workers.

Many of the same unjust and insensitive actions that gave birth to the civil rights movement led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and others are raising their ugly, mean-spirited, narrow-minded heads in local, county, state, and federal governments and communities. We will not and must not stand idly by and not put up a vigorous, God-inspired fight until we see “justice and liberty for all” regardless of race, creed, color, culture, class, country of origin, or language.

Therefore, the ABCUSA Immigration Task Force, in an effort to approach immigration in a pastoral, prophetic, practical, and personal manner, presents the opportunity for you and your congregation and/or ministry to get involved in ministering to our immigrant brothers and sisters from all over the world who have come to our country for a better life.

Dr. Warren H. Stewart Sr. is senior pastor of the First Institutional Baptist Church, Phoenix, Arizona; he has served as past board chairperson of the National Immigration Forum, a leading immigration advocacy organization that works to advance responsible federal immigration policies through policy expertise, communications outreach, and coalition building work.



SESSION 1: PASTORAL

Jesus as Refugee

by Rev. Ruth Mooney

Based on Matthew 2:13–23; Psalm 146:9 (Good News Translation); Leviticus 19:33–34

Study

■ Read Matthew 2:13–23 together.

■ Show the class on a map the trip that Joseph and his family took, walking for five days along the Mediterranean coast to avoid the Sinai desert. Explain that they probably traveled to Alexandria, where there was a large Jewish population of over one million immigrants. Alexandria was a modern cosmopolitan city, a major center of Greek civilization, and very prosperous. It was quite a contrast to the backwater village of Bethlehem. Some commentators believe that Jesus and

his family lived there for four to seven years. This experience of being surrounded by diverse cultures may have shaped Jesus for his future ministry.

■ Bibliogram: Divide the class into three groups and assign a character to each group: Joseph, Mary, and Jesus. Explain that they should put themselves in the shoes of their character, imagining that they have traveled to Egypt, lived in the Jewish community of cosmopolitan Alexandria for about seven years, and returned and settled in Nazareth. They are recalling all these experiences—what happened and how they felt. Each group should take on their character and converse among themselves from that perspective. If they need a jump start, they can use some of these questions:

- ❖ Why were you forced to emigrate to Egypt?
- ❖ What were your feelings along the way?
- ❖ What were your main worries?
- ❖ What was it like moving from small-town Bethlehem to this city of one million people?
- ❖ Was anyone there to welcome you?
- ❖ What were the major adaptations you had to make?
- ❖ What did you like or not like?
- ❖ How did you feel when you returned to Palestine and realized you couldn't live in Bethlehem?

- ❖ What have you learned from this experience?
- ❖ In what ways did you experience God's presence in the midst of all that happened?

■ Bring the groups back together and ask each to share their impressions from the perspective of their character.

Reflect

Guide a discussion using these questions:

- What is the significance for you that God chose to become human in the form of a refugee?
- Read Psalm 146:9 and Leviticus 19:33–34. Why was Israel told to care for the foreigners among them?
- What role did the Jews in Egypt play in preparing Jesus for his mission? How did they benefit later?

Apply

Guide a discussion using these questions:

- The majority of people in the United States have roots in other countries. Share stories of when and why your ancestors came to the United States.
- What has your family contributed to this country?
- What gifts (cultural, social, economic, knowledge, etc.) do immigrants bring to their new country?
- Can you name a famous immigrant to the United States? (See <http://www.biography.com/people/groups/immigration-us-immigrant>.)

Commit

Choose one of these activities to close:

- As a group, create a responsive reading on the theme of this lesson to use in worship.
- Close with the following responsive reading.

Leader: Lord of life, we praise you.

Group: You protect the strangers who live in our land.

Leader: Your Son, Jesus, lived the bitter experience of being a refugee.

Group: You protect the strangers who live in our land.

Leader: The community that received him was blessed by him.

Group: You protect the strangers who live in our land.

Leader: Our ancestors were immigrants.

Group: You protect the strangers who live in our land.

Leader: We live in a country of immigrants.

Group: You protect the strangers who live in our land.

Leader: We see the face of Jesus in every immigrant.

Group: You protect the strangers who live in our land.

All: Lord of life, we praise you.

Rev. Ruth Mooney is commissioned by International Ministries, ABCUSA, as an international missionary in Costa Rica, where she serves on the faculty of the Latin American Biblical University (UBL).



might we learn from the action of the pharaoh's daughter? If the pharaoh's daughter was following the law, what should she have done with the baby she found? Why didn't she do so? Was it possible that she knew the girl who volunteered to find a nurse for the child? Was it possible that she understood who this nurse might be? Are her actions, perhaps, a form of civil disobedience or nonviolent resistance?

■ If you have enough people, break into five groups and assign each group one of the following Scriptures: Deuteronomy 10:18–19; Proverbs 31:8–9; Isaiah 61:1–4; Micah 6:8; Hebrews 13:2. (If you don't break into groups, simply invite volunteers to read each passage aloud.) In small groups or as a whole group, discern the relevance of the Scripture passage to our relationship with undocumented persons. What guidance does the passage have to offer? Be as specific as possible. If you are discussing these passages in small groups, have each small group report back to the whole group on their findings.

SESSION 2: PRACTICAL

Pulled Out of the Water

by Rev. Sandra Hasenauer

Based on Exodus 1:8–2:10; Deuteronomy 10:18–19; Proverbs 31:8–9; Isaiah 61:1–4; Micah 6:8; Hebrews 13:2

Study

- Read together Exodus 1:8–2:10 in the manner of your choosing. For example, have one or more volunteers share in the reading, or have volunteers role-play the story while someone else reads it aloud.
- Invite the group to focus for a few moments on Moses' mother. What were her fears? How did she act on those fears?
- Read "A Mother Who Brought Her Daughter to the United States" from "Stories for Reflection" (page 15). What lesson

Reflect

■ In notebooks or on paper that you have provided, invite group members to quietly reflect on the following questions, journaling their responses:

❖ Imagine yourself as Shiprah and Puah (Exodus 1:15–20). What risks did you take in making the decisions you made? Why did you make these decisions? How did God bless you (the midwife) for the actions you took? How might this relate to you in today's world?

❖ Imagine yourself as the pharaoh's daughter. What fears may you have had when you first saw the baby in the basket? What fears may you have had when talking with the young girl (Moses' sister) who appeared? When meeting the "nurse" the girl brought to you? How do you think you would have addressed these fears in your own mind? What guidance could we take from the pharaoh's daughter in today's world?

❖ What themes from the Bible studies you have just engaged in stand out to you? What insights have you gained into what you feel your faith says about being in relationship with immigrants and refugees?

❖ What Scripture (one you just studied, or another that comes to mind) would you like to spend more time with in prayer?

Apply

■ Choose one or more of the following activities to do as a group (or assign activities and invite people to bring information back to a future session):

❖ If you have access to the Internet in your meeting space, take some time during the session to look up the following sites. Alternatively, look up the sites ahead of time and prepare handouts for the group that give the website URL, a brief description of the purpose of the organization, and some highlights for what can be found on the site:

- Church World Service (www.cwsglobal.org): hygiene kits; Angels to Angels letter-writing program (search the CWS site for Angels to Angels); advocacy resources
- Interfaith Immigration Coalition (www.interfaithimmigration.org): advocacy and information resources; worship resources
- National Immigration Forum: advocacy and information resources; programs for businesses and faith communities
- Foster care programs such as that available through the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (<http://lirs.org/fostercare>)
- Visiting Detention Centers
- Detention Watch Network (www.detentionwatchnetwork.org)
- CIVIC End Isolation (www.endisolation.org): includes an interactive map with locations of detention centers
- KIND—Kids In Need of Defense (www.supportkind.org): addressing legal needs of unaccompanied children; information about volunteering as a legal representative

❖ There is a great need for advocacy on legislation before Congress. As legislative activity frequently changes, encourage group members to visit the sites listed above as well as the following:

- www.govtrack.us: By setting up an account, you can track particular legislation before the House or Senate, as well as your elected representatives' positions on the legislation. Links allow you to easily voice your own opinion to your representatives.
- Sign up for email lists and alerts available at any of the sites listed above. Also sign up with Google news

alerts at www.google.com/alerts, using such keywords as “immigration reform,” “unaccompanied children,” or other topics of interest.

❖ Download and distribute information available from American Baptist Home Mission Societies, such as “Children Fleeing Violence Talking Points” and “Key points for talking about the unaccompanied children with a favorably inclined audience,” both available at www.abhms.org/justice_ministries/immigration_and_refugee_services/. Discuss the information on the documents and have a time of role play in the group, practicing conversations you may have with neighbors and friends.

■ Consider what spiritual and emotional needs unaccompanied children, undocumented persons, or newly arrived persons may have. How can you or your congregation respond to these needs? In what special ways might you reach out?

Commit

Choose one or more of the following:

❖ Invite group members to choose two or three actions, based on the reflections and information gathered during this session, that they will commit to taking in the near future. Set a time frame, such as one week, one month, or six months. Ask group members to determine also a plan for accountability: How will they know when they have completed their chosen actions, and with whom will they share their experience?

❖ If you are contemplating a mission focus on this topic, have individuals choose facets of possible actions you may take as a group, and have each make a plan for exploring that facet. For example, one person may find worship resources, another may research your local elected officials' positions on legislation, another may contact a local detention center about visitation possibilities, and so forth. Set a date to come back together to share the results and make future plans.

❖ Plan a worship service for your group, for your faith community, or as a community-wide worship experience, seeking God's blessings and guidance for engagement with vulnerable people.

Rev. Sandra DeMott Hasenauer serves as associate executive director for American Baptist Women's Ministries. Growing up in a family with a Vietnamese foster sister and brother, Sandy has followed in her parents' footsteps by being involved in refugee resettlement in Rochester, New York, as well as sitting on the ABCUSA Burma Refugee Commission and assisting with AB Women's Ministries immigrant and refugee ministry focuses.



SESSION 3: PROPHETIC

A Prophetic Community

by Rev. Elizabeth Conde-Frazier

Based on Genesis 1:27, Matthew 25:31-46

Study

■ Read Genesis 1:27 and discuss briefly the implications of God creating humankind in God's image. After a few moments of discussion, read the following:

God created us—both male and female—in God's image. What are the deep implications for this? There is no dichotomy between humankind and God's image. This is difficult to understand unless we keep before us the image of God, the understanding of who God is, and what God stands for. Jesus came to reveal God to us, and in Jesus we see love, light, and life. The enemy represents death. He has come to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10). Why? His purpose is to erase the image of God in the world. Among all of creation, humans most closely represent the image of God. We catch a glimpse of the glory of God in the faces of one another. If we portray one another as something less by placing one another in categories that take away our full humanity, such as when we use words of hatred, when we become

enemies so we can rationalize killing one another, or when we become rightless human beings to a government, then we are erasing the image of God.

After the reading, invite group members to briefly share their thoughts and reactions.

■ Next, review the following terms often used in the media or by protestors: *illegal aliens*, *illegal immigrants*, and just *illegals*. Take a brief survey of the group: What impact does the word *illegal* have on our impression of another person? After a few moments of discussion, read the following:

Historically, when we want to claim for ourselves the land, the raw materials, the right to govern a people, we portray them as less than able to do for themselves—as less than human. The Spanish crown debated whether indigenous peoples were as human as Europeans. Enslavement of peoples portrays the enslaved as animals, stupid, or barbaric.

Today we portray persons seeking sustenance or competing with our self-interests as illegal aliens. They are not as worthy as the citizens, they are against the laws of the land. Oscar Romero's prophetic words make it clear that we are not made for the laws of the land but that the laws of the land are made for people created in the image of God. "A society's or political community's reason for being is not the security of the state but the human person. Christ said, 'Man is not for the sabbath; the sabbath is for man.' He puts human beings as the objective of all laws and all institutions. Humans are not for the state; the state is for them" (Oscar Romero, January 15, 1978).

On the other hand, the understanding that we are created in the image of God (the *imago Dei*) gives the person worthiness as opposed to any other human standard. The creation gives each person intrinsic dignity. To respect the dignity of each person is a form of revering God. The church believes that every person is created in God's image; therefore, anyone who tramples on another human being tramples on God. That is, that person spits on, lashes, and crucifies the Christ all over again.

After the reading, invite group members to share their thoughts and reactions.

Reflect

■ Read together Matthew 25:31–46. Invite group members to briefly discuss how they feel this passage may relate to immigrants and refugees. After a brief discussion, read the following:

One form of dignity is to insure that all persons have sufficiency. Sufficiency is the meeting of basic human needs: shelter, fellowship with others, water, food, and so forth. Providing these things is equated with faithfulness to God in this passage from Matthew. Sufficiency is actions and practices that permit or foster the human dignity of others. This is part of holy living. In the letter to the Colossians, Paul urges us to “put to death . . . whatever belongs to [our] earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry” (Colossians 3:5 NIV). Lust and greed make it possible for us to overlook when our self-interest denies others of sufficiency or of life. We love the self more than others, and we make idols of ourselves or of the values of our society. By doing so, we deal a death blow to others. But God's people are to have no other gods but Yahweh.

The ideologies around us create a way of thinking, a consciousness that makes it right for us to want and to have and to deny others. Ideologies make us believe that we are in the right. But does the ideology we live by reflect the values of the kingdom of God? Ideologies are the mostly widely shared beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that are incorporated in social practices and institutional life. They tell us who belongs, who does not belong, and why; who has the right to have and who does not. Today these ideologies confuse for us our

needs and our wants, thus feeding our greed. To transform an ideology and, hence, its power, one needs to generate a new consciousness that has as its goal the reign of God, which is righteousness, love, and peace. We need a conversion to the values of God that invite us beyond self-interest to compassion and empathy: this is the heart of God. To love God is to love the neighbor.

■ Reflect together on the following questions:

❖ What ideologies can you name that seem to be undergirding the current discussion on immigration, undocumented persons, unaccompanied children, and related issues? (Responses may be positive or negative.)

❖ For each ideology named, discuss Scriptures that either support or deny that ideology.

❖ How might our Christian faith inform the development of a new ideology, a new set of “beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors to be incorporated into social practices and institutional life”?

Apply

■ Discuss together the word *prophet*. What does it mean to be a prophet today? After a brief discussion, read the following:

Prophets convey the things of God, and they make sense of them in the times in which they live. They live in the borderland between God and people, and they announce the purpose and the activity of God in their times. They invite us to align ourselves with God's activity or mission in the world. And they invite us to reposition ourselves with the purpose of promoting advocacy beyond self-interest and for the welfare of the wider community.

A prophetic community is one in which the word of God becomes flesh. This is the word of God as event, words that become an action taking place or about to take place among us. Our words become deeds—our deeds become an expression of servanthood—our servanthood gives forth fruit—this fruit creates a variance in the way our society is run—this change is a semblance of the *basileia* or reign of God. This requires integrity or the coordination of our mission statements, our preached word with our practices.

■ After the reading, reflect together on the following questions:

- ❖ Do you think of yourself as a prophet? Why or why not?
- ❖ What characteristics do prophets have? Can you develop one or more of these characteristics in yourself?
- ❖ What role do prophets play in the discussion about immigration reform?

Commit

■ Read together James 2:14–18. Discuss as a group the balance between faith and works as described in this passage. How does this question apply to discussions about immigration reform? After a brief discussion, read the following:

What forms can this prophetic voice take? We can join other churches with like mission, and together we can write letters or visit the local offices of our legislators to have conversations about these matters. Legislators are, at times, at a loss for how to present a bold stance, and the arguments that we make can be helpful to them. Legislators will represent the voice they hear, and the voices that represent fear and self-interest are louder unless we announce the views of the kingdom by inserting our own voices and reasons: a new consciousness. We can find out which programs at federal and state levels immigrants are eligible for. We can be a part

of helping persons become citizens according to the laws of the land by providing legal counsel. We can provide scholarships for dreamers to attend college. Our American Baptist colleges can provide education for them. All these are legal processes for our prophetic action.

Let the words of Oscar Romero encourage us in these actions: “If there is hope of a new world, of a new nation, of a more just order, of a reflection of God’s kingdom in our society, brothers and sisters, surely you are the ones who will bring about this wonder of a new world—but only when we are really communicators of life; communicators of the seed that will transform the world” (Oscar Romero, June 15, 1978).

■ After the reading, invite group members to consider one or more actions they are willing to commit to taking in the next week, two weeks, or month. Have them write their commitments in their notebooks or paper. Join in a time of prayer for God’s guidance as you carry through on your commitments.

Rev. Dr. Elizabeth Conde-Frazier serves as dean of Esperanza College and is author of Listen to the Children/Escuchemos a los niños: Conversations with Immigrant Families/Conversaciones con familias inmigrantes (Judson Press, 2011).



American Baptist Churches USA TASK FORCE ON IMMIGRATION

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Photo Credit: ABCUSA missionary Mayra Giovanetti

SESSION 4: PERSONAL

Who Is My Neighbor?

by Rev. Ray Schellinger

Based on Luke 10:25–37

Study

- Read together Luke 10:25–37 in the manner of your choosing. (This is a good story to dramatize if your group enjoys creative approaches to Scripture.)
- Read these words from American Baptist international missionary in Mexico, Rev. Ray Schellinger:

As missionaries with International Ministries, we are sent by our American Baptist churches to reach out across international boundaries and difficult barriers of ethnicity, language, culture, and faith in order to bring God’s good news of love and grace to those who don’t yet know it.

One passage from Scripture that has held much meaning for me throughout our ministry has been Jesus’ parable of the good Samaritan. It’s likely that we all know the passage well, but there is one part in particular that calls out to me. It is the act of seeing the man who has fallen victim—*truly* seeing him for who he is. Jesus uses that word each time someone approaches the victim on the road: They *see* him and then . . .

The priest and the Levite see the injured man and then move over and leave the path, taking pains to ensure they do not contact the man in any way. They do this because they are bound by the purification codes of their faith, such as the one found in Leviticus 21:1–4. The law states that because of their sacred duties, they must not defile them-

selves by touching a man who might die, or even come into contact with his blood. The only exceptions to this are for an immediate relative: a father, mother, daughter, son, brother, or sister. The priest and the Levite saw the blood seeping out of open wounds and knew it wasn't *their* blood: they saw the man, but they didn't see a "brother." In accordance with the law, they walked way around him and kept on going.

Interestingly, the Samaritan, the impure and hated foreigner, shared the same law and held the same purity codes. He, too, should not have defiled himself for a stranger. Yet Jesus says that the Samaritan *saw* the man, and, to translate this literally, exploded with compassion. The Samaritan took enormous risk and went to great expense to bring healing to the dying man. It was the Samaritan, the one whom no one else would possibly see as a brother, who saw his brother in the face of the stranger.

Reflect

■ After reading the missionary's words above, reflect together as a group, using the following questions to guide your discussion:

❖ The priest and Levite were acting out of their own fears when they refused to help the beaten man. What feelings, attitudes or fears to you feel may prevent people from wanting to be involved, to help?

❖ Are there real or metaphorical fears of being rendered unclean by association?

■ Read these words from Ray Schellinger:

I believe this is what we are asked to do. As you send us missionaries across borders, you ask us to love the people we are sent to serve as if they are our brothers and sisters, without regard for barriers of ethnicity, culture, and language. In my time as a missionary, I have seen the Samaritan story played out again and again. However, it has been humbling to find myself much more often in the role of the vulnerable traveler dependent on the compassion of strangers than as one who can offer help. The hospitality I have received has been overwhelming and serves as a constant reminder to me.

■ Discuss together as a group: Are there times when you have thought you were in a situation in order to serve others, only to find yourself on the receiving end, as Schellinger describes above?

■ Did that change your perception about those you were there originally to serve? How did you view them before meeting them? How did you view them after meeting them?

■ What does this tell you about the role of developing *personal* relationships with others in our approach to mission and outreach?

Apply

■ Read these words from Ray Schellinger:

Perhaps this is why it has become so painful to stand with my Mexican hosts on the other side of the fence and look back across to the United States. I know they don't receive the same welcome in my country as I have received in theirs.

The city I work in, Tijuana, Mexico, has been growing faster over the last decade than the infrastructure can possibly handle. Hundreds of thousands of migrants have come here from the south of Mexico, part of the exodus of tens of millions of rural farmers who have moved to the urban slums as their traditional way of life gave way to globalization. Now, as many people are arriving here from the north as have come from the south, deported from the United States and abruptly dropped at the border with only the clothes on their backs, mental pictures of the families they leave behind in the United States, and few possibilities for their future. Tijuana is a town of migrants, people trying to survive in a culture that is not theirs. It seems that we are all foreigners here. Vulnerable. Afraid. Alone.

■ Discuss together as a group:

❖ There have been many times in the history of the United States when people have migrated from one part of the country to another to find a way to put food on the table. Two notable periods are the Dust Bowl migration from the Plains states, primarily to California, in the 1930s and '40s, and the migration of African Americans from the south to urban areas further north between 1910 and 1970 (the largest movement between 1910 and 1930). In lesser numbers, even today some cities and states experience large increases or decreases in population as people move to where jobs are. Schellinger's description above of the farmers of Mexico moving to urban areas as their land disappears to corporate entities mirrors these same migrations in our own U.S. history. Does looking at history in this light help increase your understanding of the situation that people of Mexico and Central America face?

❖ Part of being able to see another individual as our neighbor, or our sister or brother, is being able to imagine ourselves

in their shoes. Imagine you and your family in the same situation—seeing your ability to support yourself and your family disappear in front of you: How far would you be prepared to go to feed your children?

❖ When people are deported from the United States, they are not generally returned to family or communities they know. Instead, they are taken just across the border and dropped off with, as Schellinger points out, basically the clothes they are wearing and little or no cash. Many of them have been away so long they no longer have a frame of reference for Mexican culture or any sort of support network in Mexico. Their families, friends, and jobs are all back in the United States. In what way, then, are these deportees like the beaten man in the parable of the good Samaritan?

Commit

■ Read these words from Ray Schellinger:

I don't need to tell you that the mission field I work in has come to the doorsteps of our churches in the United States. For many of us, the presence of so many different people is a threat. We are so busy fearing the threat that we miss seeing the opportunity. With all the labels and slurs we heap on the strangers and sojourners living among us, we forget to see them, to really *see* them for who they are: our brothers and sisters, our blood.

■ Read together again Luke 10:25–37, this time in the style of *lectio divina*, also known as “Dwelling in the Word,” as follows:

❖ Invite group members to get into comfortable positions and become silent. You may want to begin by focusing on breathing or repeating silently a simple phrase such as “God, send me your Word.”

❖ After a few moments of focusing, let the group know that as the Scripture is read for the first time, they should listen for the word or phrase that God makes stand out to them. Then have one person read the text slowly and gently.

❖ Allow a few moments of silence after the reading; then ask group members to share (as they're comfortable) what word or phrase stood out for them in the first reading. You do not need to spend time discussing responses now—simply share.

❖ After the sharing is complete, tell group members that they will now hear the Scripture read again, and this time they should consider where this word or phrase that stood out for them intersects with the conversations you have been having during these sessions on immigration (or simply what

they have going on in their lives at the moment). Invite another volunteer—someone of a different gender, age, racial/ethnic group, or in another way different from the first volunteer—to read the Scripture slowly and gently.

❖ After this second reading, allow a few moments of silence, and then invite those who would like to share their reflections to do so.

❖ After discussion, tell the group that they will now hear the Scripture a third time, and this time they should listen for what Christ is calling them to do or become today or this week. Invite a third volunteer to read the Scripture again, slowly and gently.

❖ After the third reading, allow a few moments of silence, and then invite those who would like to share their reflections to do so.

If you have done all four sessions in this resource as a group, spend some time at the end of this final session—or have a fifth session solely devoted to discussing next steps. Be specific in the discussions and establish a definite timeline: as a group, be sure to end the meeting with people clear on specific assignments and deadlines.

Some excellent next steps may include writing articles for the church or region newsletter on how your community is connected to these issues; creating a letter-writing campaign in your congregation or other group to address legislation in front of your elected officials; planning additional learning opportunities for the congregation or community; working with pastoral leaders to plan special worship services (good opportunities to plan around are World Refugee Day on June 20 or International Migrant Day on December 18); planning outreach and ministry with migrants and refugees in your community, and so forth.

Rev. Ray Schellinger serves as American Baptist missionary with the “Dios Con Nosotros” Baptist Convention of Northern Baja California, Mexico.

Stories for Reflection

Read one story and use the questions at the end to guide your reflection. You may use the same questions to discuss more than one story if you choose.



A Mother Who Brought Her Daughter to the United States

Translated and transcribed from an interview with a congregant by Pastor Douglas Avilesbernal

[We wanted to bring our daughter to the United States] because there were already several years when we had been apart; she was in Mexico. Those were years when we were living with that pain of not having her close to us. We wanted her to be with us because she is our family, and we wanted her to be [with us] together as a family. Another problem is that there's a lot of violence in Mexico and they were going

through very, very difficult, ugly things down there. All of my family is suffering under this violence, but I cannot bring all of my extended family, so we had to decide to bring at least our daughter up.

She did not come legally because you need way too many things to even be allowed to come visit this country. First of all, it is very difficult even just to get to the embassy. One needs a lot of money for the application process to even be started, and then just in order to be considered, one needs to have properties, to have businesses, to have cars, to have a very solid financial grounding.

Our only option was to bring her the way we did, because it was already too dangerous and we just could not have her stay in that danger.

It took me years to come to this decision. It took so long because it's a very, very risky choice, but at the same time, I was completely between a rock and a hard place. The choice really was, should I risk my daughter greatly in the hope that she would make it to where we are, or wait for something terrible to happen to her while she stays there?

[The risks of the trip] depend on where you cross. If you come through the desert, you need a guide who knows very, very well the whole area and how to get through it because of the very high risks that are involved in that. If you come through the desert, it takes about five days and four nights of constant walking to get across into the States. Women are at higher risk because you're completely dependent on the person getting you across. That person could choose to be nice to you, but they could just as easily abuse you physically, they could leave you in the desert, they could rob you of everything you have. You are completely at the mercy of this person, usually a man.

[The journey from home to the United States could take weeks.] I really only was able to speak with my daughter the day before she left home; I told her she needed to be strong, that she needed to just keep going, because she would be with us if she would just keep going through that time. It was a very difficult conversation. There were about five or six days when I didn't know anything about where she was or how she was doing. For five days, because she was coming across the border, I was not able to talk with her. She came through in a van. It was very, very difficult not to know anything about what was happening, but I did have the faith and the hope that she was going to get across.

During those five days, I was afraid because I knew what could happen. I was worried because I didn't know what was

happening, and at the same time I was very, very excited because I could possibly be about to see my daughter again. It had been six years since I'd seen my daughter.

They told us that the crossing would take a couple of hours, but later we learned that because she had to learn a lot of things, she had to memorize what to say if she was questioned and they were pulled over and everything, it took much longer. They say it could be three hours, and then it's a day and another day and another day. A lot of things go through your mind; you think of a lot of things that could go wrong. But you have to just keep faith in God that she's going to make it through and be able to be across.

It was an amazing experience [when she arrived]. My heart was beating so fast. She was a completely different girl than when I'd left. When I left she was one and a half. When I saw her again, she was almost seven. She was a completely different person. It was an overwhelming experience to finally be able to have her in person in front of me, to hug her, to give her a kiss, to talk to her in person, not over the phone. It was just overwhelming.



The Asylum Process

by Pastor Douglas Avilesbernal

About two years ago I received a call from a parishioner informing me that he had to pick up his nephew who had just been released by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). That phone call started a long and involved process that continues to this day. What follows is the story of what happened.

The parishioner's nephew decided he needed to leave Honduras because he was reaching the age at which gangs (*maras*) recruited new members. He felt unsafe where he lived, so he chose the lesser of two very high risks and left home. The border patrol captured the parishioner's nephew while trying to cross into the States. He was not returned to his country because he was underage at the time of his arrest, so he was sent to a detention center in Chicago for two months.

Once released to his uncle, the young man received a court date set for two months after his release. We hired an immigration attorney to help with the case. The attorney's fees were several thousand dollars, but we had no options given how little time there was before the first court date.

The attorney knew we were going to need to apply for asylum. At the same time, we were going to have to keep deferring the deportation process. During the first year, the young man had three court dates for deportation at which he had to be present to verify his identity. At the same time, we had to begin the process of applying for asylum. Both of these processes are lengthy and complicated.

Nonetheless, the approval of the asylum application came at the beginning of the second year. Our first step after that approval was to go to have the young man fingerprinted at an INS center in the next state over from us. At the same time, the deportation process was still ongoing, so the attorney had to keep filing postponements. Fortunately, the boy no longer had to go to court for the postponement filings. Though he was approved for asylum, he still had a wait of several months while we submitted all necessary documents.

After several more months, the asylum office set an appointment at the asylum center in New Jersey. The appointment was for 9:00 a.m., which meant we had to leave Pennsylvania just before 6:00 a.m. to make sure we were there on time. We arrived on time, but as it turned out, we had left early only to sit and wait: we did not go into the interview until 1:00 p.m.

Before an interview can take place, a young person has to have several meetings with an attorney to go over the details of everything that has taken place since he or she left home. The intent is to make sure the minor knows the story so well that he or she can recite it in various ways and with complete details. *Everything* must be correct and consistent in the telling: all dates; names; money paid; places seen; details of when, where, and how the minor was arrested; and more! Since the entire process hinges on the interview, one cannot rehearse enough. One mistake can be the difference between acceptance and rejection. Needless to say, this is a tense time for the minor and the interpreter.

Anyone interviewed for asylum needs to bring his or her own interpreter and, of course, be on time. The interview begins with everyone being sworn in. Then the officer calls a second interpreter in over the phone to verify the translation. Once everything is in place, the asylum agent goes over the story and asks questions as she or he works through the story in detail: “When did this happen? Who was with you? When were you caught? What kind of car were you put into? How long were you in detention?” and so forth. After running through the story once, the officer asks a series of seemingly random questions. These questions are not in chronological order and often repeat. Every so often, the officer asks if the minor is sure about his or her answer, even if it has been exactly the same every time he or she has been asked! If there is a minor discrepancy in the answer, the officer asks for clarification. The entire time everyone knows that any one of those answers can be part of the reason the minor is sent back to the place he or she is escaping.

Our interview for this particular minor was in early November of 2014. As of now, at the end of February 2015, we still have one or two more months before we hear if the government needs further confirmation on anything else. If we are fortunate, they do not and the child’s approval will come sometime a few months after that. If they do have further questions, however, the young man will face more interviews or requests for more documents. In either of those circumstances, the child’s case will go to the back of the line and be reviewed in another three to five months.

Pastor Douglas Avilesbernal serves as pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Norristown, Pennsylvania, a multicultural, bilingual American Baptist congregation.

Three Stories from Nicaragua

by Mayra Bonilla

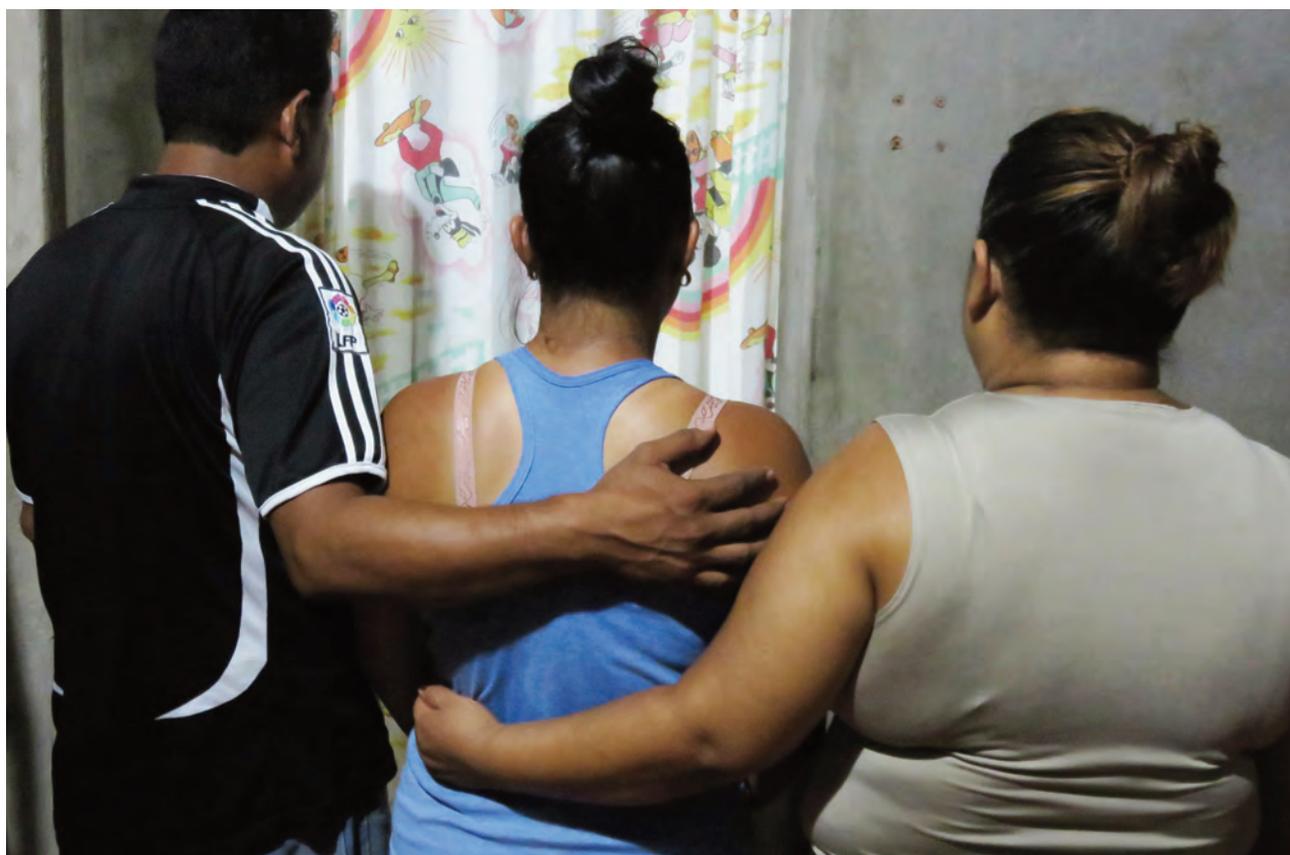
■ Story #1

The peaceful life in the Central American countryside ended abruptly because of the *maras* (gangs). Long years of paying “rent” (what the *maras* charge as protection money every month), the murders of his nephew and her brother, and the well-being of their little children were enough reasons for this family to leave everything behind and seek refuge in Nicaragua. Having had cattle, a convenience store, and their beehives, now they had to depend on the hospitality and grace of Nicaraguan families that had received, fed, and protected them. The bus driver led them to their current landlord, who in turn led them to speak to the Council of Protestant Churches of Nicaragua (CEPAD) and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Managua to seek help. Hence began their refugee process, getting the appropriate documentation to have their children continue their schooling here in Nicaragua and have access to basic health care when needed.

Through the gifts the United States and Puerto Rico sent through our mission partner, this family has beds, mattresses, and sheets to sleep with dignity. They still need kitchen utensils and appliances for their small convenience store. Despite the husband having physical disabilities, he and his wife are hard workers who yearn for their children to have a safe place to live, the education they could not have, and a healthy upbringing with dignity. They point out the hospitality bestowed on them by the Nicaraguan people and the diligence with which CEPAD/UNHCR has cared for them, facilitating not only the legal advice they need for their refugee resident permits but also providing resources for their basic needs. They lost their house, their land, their belongings, and their extended family, but in Nicaragua (even though they have already exhausted their savings), they have found security, attention, an opportunity to start anew, and a promising future for their family.

■ Story #2

Faith in God and hope for a better tomorrow keeps this family standing and optimistic toward the future. Their children have grown, but their dreams have been shattered by the *maras* (gangs). Their source of income was stolen from



them by the *maras* and their good name tainted. Their uncle's life was abruptly ended by the *maras*, and the next person in line to die would be from within their family if they did not yield to the demands of the *maras*. It was time to get rid of what they had, gather what they could, and seek refuge for their family. On their way, there were always those who guided them until they found the Council of Protestant Churches of Nicaragua (CEPAD) and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Managua. The slavery and abuse they experienced were replaced with a new life of peace and productivity with the skills God has given them.

Living with fibromyalgia is painful, but adding to that the separation from your loved ones, knowing you may not see them again, is even more painful. Living with high blood pressure is scary, but realizing that in the midst of such an abrupt move, your blood pressure is back to normal and you can sleep in peace again is a great blessing. Finding a new church home where you can worship freely and a healthy environment in which to raise your children proves that "God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them" (Ro-

mans 8:28 NLT). In the midst of the sadness of being away from the extended family, this family gives thanks to God for bringing them to Nicaragua and for the support received from our churches in the United States and Puerto Rico through CEPAD/UNHCR.

■ Story #3

Witnessing a murder when you're five is not the best start for a happy and healthy childhood. Being threatened at thirteen that unless you yield to being recruited by a gang you and your family will be killed is not the best start for a happy and healthy teenage season. Being professional and hardworking and being robbed of your dignity, source of income, and security, is not the easiest way to raise a happy and healthy family. This family lived in peace with their neighbors and yet was abused by the *maras* (gangs) in their community. From being comfortable and well, they had to move to another country, with limitations and starting from zero once again. We say "once again," because in the '80s they lived for a while in these lands, and only when things calmed down were they able to return to their country. Back then as it has been now, the Council of Protestant Churches of Nicaragua (CEPAD)

and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has given them a helping hand and aided their refugee family process.

The separation in the family was complicated. Friendships from olden days eased the pain of that temporary separation. Now the family is together and works hard to make their small business thrive. They had options to go to other countries, but they knew Nicaragua would be hospitable and cooperative and, indeed, it has been so. They have lost houses to earthquakes, wars, and now the *maras*, but nothing destroys their work spirit, their optimism, and their appreciation of the people and the country that has provided them with food and shelter and with an opportunity to live in peace and communion with God.

Lord, free Nicaragua from the *maras*, the drugs, and any community-destroying spirit—that is their prayer.

Mayra Bonilla Giovanetti is a missionary in Nicaragua, International Ministries, ABCUSA.

Questions for reflection:

- What are some of the critical problems stated in the story?
- Does the story describe what feelings the person or family had when facing these problems?
- What solution to the problems did the person or family find? What are the risks involved in that solution?
- Does the story describe what feelings the person or family has after solving their problems the way they chose to?
- Put yourself into the story. Can you imagine being in these situations, making these same choices? What choices would you have made? What do you think would have happened if you made those choices?
- Create a prayer list with two or three very specific items for prayer based on the story/stories you have read. Use this prayer list in your prayer time for the next week, or share it with your faith community in some way.



Photo Credit International Ministries: Faces obscured for safety reasons.

For Information and Further Study

American Baptist Churches USA

American Baptist Churches USA:

www.abc-usa.org. Visit News/Press Releases page for up-to-date information about American Baptist involvements.

American Baptist Home Mission Societies:

www.abhms.org. Visit Ministries & Programs/Justice Ministries/Immigration and Refugee Services for resources and information. Visit About Us/Publications/*The Christian Citizen* to download and read the 2012 issue of *The Christian Citizen*, “The Church and the Challenge of Immigration Reform.”

American Baptist Women’s Ministries:

www.abwministries.org. Visit Mission Focus/Crisis at the Border for information on unaccompanied minors and immigration reform.

International Ministries:

www.internationalministries.org. Visit Places and choose countries or visit People and choose missionary names for information about missionary involvements in origin or destination countries for migrants.

Other Websites and E-Newsletters

American Immigration Council:

www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org. (See also the Immigration Policy Center, the policy arm of the American Immigration Council, at www.immigrationpolicy.org.) This nonpartisan nonprofit organization works to educate and inform policymakers, media, and the general public on immigrant policy in U.S. society. Find resources, campaigns, and information. Subscribe to email newsletters and blog posts.

Church World Service: www.cwsglobal.org. Visit the Refugees and Immigrants page for information on work Church World Service is doing. Visit the Get Involved/Be an

Advocate page for information about advocacy on immigrant and refugee rights.

Interfaith Immigration Coalition:

www.interfaithimmigration.org. Tool kits, advocacy resources, worship resources, and other helpful information. Subscribe to the email list for interfaith updates on immigration reform information and action items.

KIND (Kids in Need of Defense):

www.supportkind.org. A pro bono movement to provide quality and compassionate legal counsel to unaccompanied refugee and immigrant children in the United States. Information, advocacy resources, suggestions for involvement.

National Immigration Forum:

www.immigrationforum.org. Programs, updates, and action alerts. Subscribe to email updates on immigration reform in the news.

Social Media

Most of the organizations referenced above have social media sites (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google+, LinkedIn, Flickr, and so forth). Links to their social media networks are generally found on their home pages. This is an excellent way to receive up-to-the-minute news and information and pass it along quickly to your own networks. Once you have “liked” or “followed” an organization, look at the list of who they follow or who follows them, for more related organizations with which you may want to connect.

