**REMC Dialogue on Immigration Notes**

**January 9, 2025**

**Discussion Topic**: How can non-immigrant congregations assist immigrant congregations and populations regarding immigration issues?

**Present**: Greg Mamula, Gregg Hemmen, Mary Day Hamel, Jim Kelsey, Jason Workman, Mindi Welton-Mitchell, Doug Avilesbernal, Joan Friesen, Al Fletcher, Steve Bils, Mark Mahserjian-Smith. Michael Friday

* Question: What difficulties are immigrant churches experiencing that can be addressed and supported?
  + Misinformation is a great concern among immigrant congregations. There is a need for accurate information. Concern over misinformation has caused panic.
  + Some “born-Americans” are concerned about others who may be undocumented. There is also some complacency on this issue perhaps coming out of a sense of societal individualism.
  + Some subgroups of congregations of a similar ethnic background will choose not to affiliate with one another. These differences can be generational, missional, authority, worship styles, etc. It is not helpful to try to gather them all together by surprise to encourage them to get along. That does not work.
  + There is a real difference among first and second generation immigrant congregations in terms of worship, practices, etc. First generation persons want to pass on some of their customs while the second generation is less concerned about that.
  + Some persons who have recently lost physical documents in a tornado have concerns about being deported.
  + Some who came here as adults were soldiers. Thus, they do not want to do anything to cause attention to themselves.
  + History has shown that citizens have been deported in the past because they “didn’t looked American.” What can we do if that happens?
* Potential Responses to the needs of immigrant congregations
  + There is some organizing within the Chin community to share accurate information.
  + We should ask leaders in the community what they need
  + Building and leveraging trust
    - How do you build trust among immigrant populations?
    - How can we leverage the relationships that we already have with immigrant congregations that are strong?
  + Educational Needs and Responses
    - Can we give instruction to immigrants of what to do and not do when confronted?
    - Do the immigration laws differ in each state?
    - We need to think about both short-term responses as well as education in a theological context
    - I have a document to share that was created by immigration attorneys.
    - Q for immigrant attorney: What about offering to store copies of current legal documents in the church? If so, would it be discoverable? What about storing them in the cloud?
    - ICE cannot enter a house unless they have a warrant signed by a judge.
    - What is process for retrieving lost documents?
    - What are the laws when confronted as an immigrant?
  + Sharing Messages and Articles
    - The day after the election, I sent a newsletter to our region saying that real people will be affected by decisions made. The responses were generally positive. We have an opportunity to speak with a prophetic voice.
  + Possible Speakers to help educate this group
    - Ray Schellinger – IM Missionary who works with immigrant populations
    - Seth Clark – IM Missionary who works on the border
    - An immigration attorney – Jim Kelsey may be able to suggest someone
    - Robin Stoops – chair of Burma Refugee Commission
    - Roy Medley – chair of Burma Action Group
    - Jason Mack – ABC pastor and the new Director of Open Doors for Refugees
* General Comments:
  + Concerns
    - Actions come with risk and many churches have been resistant to risk. Can we say, “being against injustice is not political.”
    - If migrant workers could come on a migrant visa, they would be ecstatic, but that is not currently possible.
    - Many industries are completely dependent upon immigrant workers.
    - The new Administration has said that they will rescind the rules regarding ISIS not showing up in sanctuaries.
    - Some of our churches are so concerned about survival that they are not concerned about anything else.
  + How our identity influences our response
    - What does it mean to be a diverse denomination in a time like this?
    - Politics is the integration of people, power, and resources.
    - One of the hurdles of working together has been our suspicions of one another. If we were to respond in unity, it would require our regions and different ethnic caucuses to trust one another. We would have to “get over ourselves” to pull that off.
* Next Steps
  + Jeff will inquire about an REMC page on the ABCUSA website where we can post educational documents on immigration such as:
    - The PowerPoint created by immigration attorneys
    - Immigration procedures that regions have used in the past
    - Newsletter articles, sermons, articles
  + Jeff will follow up with potential speakers
* Next Meeting: The group will begin meeting the hour prior to the REMC call the third Tuesday of the month, at 2:00 pm EST.