



Christian Reflection
A Series in Faith and Ethics

Christian Reflection
Center for Christian Ethics
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Study Guides for

Immigration

These guides integrate Bible study, prayer, and worship to help us negotiate the boundaries of citizenship and faithful discipleship as we care for immigrants. Use them individually or in a series. You may reproduce them for personal or group use.

Loving Our Neighbors, Both Far and Near 2

There may be no single “Christian” immigration policy, but by directing us to weigh the needs of outsiders against the defense of the life we share with our fellow citizens, Christian ethics illuminates the appropriate moral framework for understanding, and conducting, our immigration debates.

Ruth: Resident Alien with a Face 4

The biblical book of Ruth challenges our easy assumptions and stereotypes about immigrants today, especially when we put to it two simple questions: “What challenges does Ruth face as she accompanies her mother-in-law Naomi to Judah?” and “How does God help her meet these challenges?”

A More Perfect Union 6

To the national debate over immigration, American churches bring keen insights gleaned from biblical wisdom and years of experience working directly with immigrants. For our union to become more perfect, churches must continue not only to talk about but also to walk with immigrants.

Faithful Companions 8

How can we obey both biblical directives – to be good citizens and to show hospitality to immigrants, legal and illegal? The ISAAC Project is helping churches across the United States work within existing law to assist all immigrants by creating ESL and citizenship classes, family separation ministries, and recognized immigration organizations.

Waves of Blessing 10

Surf’s up, brothers and sisters! We can ride this wave of migration to America by seeing that God is in the current, adopting mutually dependent ministry postures alongside immigrants, and realizing their contribution to the vitality of the church and the transformation of secular society.



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Focus Article:

📖 Loving Our Neighbors,
Both Far and Near
(*Immigration*, pp. 11-19)

Suggested Article:

📖 Back to the Basics of
Immigration
(*Immigration*, pp. 84-88)

What do you think?

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Loving Our Neighbors, Both Far and Near

There may be no single “Christian” immigration policy, but by directing us to weigh the needs of outsiders against the defense of the life we share with our fellow citizens, Christian ethics illuminates the appropriate moral framework for understanding, and conducting, our immigration debates.

Prayer

Scripture Reading: Acts 17:22-28

Meditation†

For Christians, the claims and interests of nations should always be evaluated by reference to the God whose love and justice is the center of astonishingly inclusive relatedness.

The second part of a Christian’s perspective is that human particularities are valued.... We are culture-creating and culture-bearing peoples. We develop a sense of who we are by being related to particular communities, whose identity we come to share....

God is the creator of all human beings through their common ancestor Adam. Indeed, all of us are relatives. Yet nations with their boundaries also reflect God’s ordering activity.

Dana W. Wilbanks

Reflection

“The history of immigration to America can be described, without undue distortion, very simply: first a rise, then a fall, then a rise again,” writes Peter Meilaender. After what we now call the First Great Wave in the last decades of the 1800s, the increasing number and diversity of newcomers had citizens worrying about “competition for jobs, strains on urban services, immigrants not learning English, the fraying of our cultural fabric.” Today we live during the Second Great Wave with historically high levels of immigration to the United States—33 million people, about 12% of the population, are foreign born—and we are hearing the same concerns of a hundred years ago.

The public debate about reforming America’s immigration laws is becoming ever more urgent and rancorous. How should we respond with love and justice to the new immigrants whom Scripture commends to our care as the “strangers...who live among you” (Deuteronomy 16:11), even as we care for our fellow citizens? When we pass laws to manage immigration, “we are in effect exercising state force in order to preserve the particular way of life that we share with our fellow citizens,” Meilaender points out. The key moral questions are: “On what basis might we restrict access to this life that we share? Are we entitled to show this kind of preference for our own compatriots?”

Restrictions on immigration need not be selfishly motivated; they “can and should be defended in moral terms, consistent with commitments to equality and love of neighbor,” suggests Meilaender. “Because we share in a common life, involving a range of shared institutions and practices, we develop obligations towards one



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another that we do not have, or not to the same degree, towards outsiders – not because we do not love those outsiders, or because we think that our fellow citizens are somehow better than folks elsewhere, but simply because these are the people with whom our lot has been cast.” So, when we evaluate immigration policies we should ask if they “serve our neighbors who will face competition for their jobs; or the children whose education will suffer in overburdened schools; or those fellow citizens in communities whose ways of life will be disrupted by a continuing influx of immigration at current levels; or indeed our own grandchildren, to whom we hope to pass on a cultural and political heritage.”

Countries should not limit legal immigration by anyone without good reason. Yet, Meilaender admits, reasonable people may disagree about “the thorniest but most important question of all: determining appropriate levels of legal immigration.”

Study Questions

1. As Dana Wilbanks notes (in the meditation), Paul recognized both “the unity of the human family in God and the diversity of the peoples of the earth” in Acts 17:22-28. How does this relate to Peter Meilaender’s reminder that we must balance love for all our neighbors, both far and near?
2. Why is the United States experiencing a historically high level of immigration today, according to Meilaender’s article?
3. Meilaender defends a special obligation to ‘near’ neighbors this way: “That citizens share a common life, shaping and being shaped by one another through their mutual encounters, appropriately gives rise to expectations for treatment different from that accorded strangers.” Do you agree? How is this special obligation compatible with God’s call for us to love all people?
4. How might we apply Meilaender’s insights to granting residency that leads to citizenship for various types of immigrants – e.g., people who need asylum, relatives of current citizens, illegal immigrants already residing in the country, or people who have economically valuable skills?

Departing Hymn: “O God, In Whom We Live and Move” (vv. 1, 2a, and 4a)

O God, in whom we live and move,
your love is law, your law is love;
your present Spirit waits to fill
the soul that comes to do your will.

Unto your children’s spirits teach
your love, beyond the powers of speech;
with faith, O God, our spirits fill,
that we may work in patience still.

Samuel Longfellow (1864), alt.

Suggested Tunes: GERMANY or OLD 100th

† Dana W. Wilbanks, *Re-Creating America: The Ethics of U.S. Immigration and Refugee Policy in a Christian Perspective* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 120.



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Focus Article:

📖 Ruth: Resident Alien with a Face
(*Immigration*, pp. 20-25)

Suggested Article:

📖 Beyond Risk and Uncertainty
(*Immigration*, pp. 68-71)

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Ruth: Resident Alien with a Face

The biblical book of Ruth challenges our easy assumptions and stereotypes about immigrants today, especially when we put to it two simple questions: "What challenges does Ruth face as she accompanies her mother-in-law Naomi to Judah?" and "How does God help her meet these challenges?"

Prayer

O God of creation, your redeeming work in this world is not dictated by borders, by lines on a map. We praise you for the unreserved nature of your mercy and the expansive reach of your love. You have created all the people of the earth in your image and care for each one.

Remind us this day of your call for us to be a blessing to all families of the earth, and illuminate the fears that make us unwilling to be the vessels of your blessing to those who live as strangers among us. Amen.

Scripture Reading: Ruth 1:22-2:23

Reflection

The people of Israel carefully distinguished among the other persons who lived among them. They used *zar* and *nokri* ("foreigner") to describe those like the Canaanites, Ammonites, and Moabites who had no part in Israel, but used *ger* ("alien" or "sojourner") for one "who comes from outside the community but who settles within the community," Dana Wilbanks has noted. "The *ger* is very much like what we today call 'resident alien.' He or she may be a refugee or an immigrant, settling into the community but still as an outsider who brings a different communal identity. Within the covenant community, however, this difference does not justify a double standard of justice."[†]

In the story of Ruth, which is set in the time when there is "no king in Israel" and "everybody does what is right in his own eyes" (cf. Judges 17:6), the main character moves from being a Moabite foreigner to a valued member of the community. Ruth's amazing transformation of status is due to the discerning eye and generous heart of Boaz, to whom she marvels: "Why have I found favor in your sight, that you should take notice of me, when I am a foreigner [*nokriya*]?" (2:10). Boaz feeds and protects Ruth as she gleanes grain from his fields. When she boldly seeks Boaz's protection through the institution of levirate marriage (3:6-9, cf. Deuteronomy 25:5-10), he is so impressed by her courage and character that he negotiates with a kinsman for the honor of "redeeming" her (4:1-12).

Reflecting on this beloved story, Michael Moore makes three observations about caring for the "Ruths" among us today:

- ▶ *Socioeconomic distress ("famine") is most often responsible for immigration.* Many "find themselves in miserably desperate situations," he writes. "Whether the river they have to cross is the Jordan, or the Mississippi, or the Rio Grande, they have to do whatever it takes to insure the safety and welfare of their families. When food and shelter become scarce the only option they have left is to pack up and move."



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- ▶ *Not every immigrant deserves or even wants to be “redeemed.”* Behind Ruth’s story are other abusive immigrants of the time (e.g., the Danites described in Judges 18). “Only the most naïve universalist would argue that every immigrant deserves the same treatment,” Moore says of immigrants today, as then. “On the contrary, many immigrants do not *ask* ‘Boaz’ for help, they *demand* it. Imagine Ruth coming to Boaz that night on the threshing floor and accusing him of neglect instead of asking him to obey his own law. People on both sides of the immigration question can learn a lot from the attitudes and behavior of these biblical characters.”
- ▶ *Genuine “Ruths” among us are crucial to our well-being as God’s people.* God “has a habit of redeeming *anyone* who wants to channel his ‘covenant love,’ regardless of status or bloodline or standard of living,” writes Moore. “God takes great delight in bringing ‘Ruths’ among us. They channel his grace in ways no one else can.”

Study Questions

1. How does God bless Ruth through the lives of others in the story? How does God bless the people of Israel through her?
2. Should we be wary of some foreigners? What character traits must we develop to distinguish which immigrants are “Ruths”?
3. In the early 20th century Americans worried that immigrants did not share their standard of living, social mores, and form of government. Due to this “nativistic hysteria,” Moore says, “it became difficult to recognize the ‘Ruths’ from the ‘Danites.’” Are there signs that we’re doing the same thing today?
4. God still cares for immigrants through those who welcome them. According to Dan Royer, how did members of his congregation in Selkirk, Ontario, bless him? Do you have a similar experience of welcoming or being welcomed by others?

Departing Hymn: “There’s a Wideness in God’s Mercy” (vv. 1, 5, and 8)

There’s a wideness in God’s mercy,
like the wideness of the sea;
there’s a kindness in his justice,
which is more than liberty.

For the love of God is broader
than the measure of one’s mind;
and the heart of the Eternal
is most wonderfully kind.

If our love were but more simple,
we could take him at his word;
and our lives would be more loving
in the likeness of our Lord.

Frederick W. Faber (1854), alt.
Tune: WELLESLEY

† Dana W. Wilbanks, *Re-creating America: The Ethics of U.S. Immigration and Refugee Policy in a Christian Perspective* (Nashville, TN: AbingdonPress, 1996), 99.



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Focus Articles:

📖 A More Perfect Union
(*Immigration*, pp. 26-34)

Suggested Article:

📖 Planning for Immigration
(*Immigration*, pp. 89-93)

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A More Perfect Union

To the national debate over immigration, American churches bring keen insights gleaned from biblical wisdom and years of experience working directly with immigrants. For our union to become more perfect, churches must continue not only to talk about but also to walk with immigrants.

Responsive Prayer

Merciful God, we confess we have failed to see the stranger among us.

We have closed our eyes to the injustices that force people to leave their homelands and seek shelter in unfamiliar places.

We claim that you are our refuge and security, yet we act as though national borders provide us with our only opportunity for peace.

Forgive us for ignoring your call to peacemaking and for only looking after our own interests.

Help us to recall our personal stories as sojourners in a foreign land so that we may fully embody your call to provide for the orphan, widow, and stranger. Amen.

Scripture Reading: Deuteronomy 24:14-15, 17-22

Reflection

"The three most basic questions concerning migration are 'Who has the right to migrate?' 'Where can individuals migrate?' and 'How should migrants be treated in receiving countries?'" write lawyers Michele Pistone and John Hoeffner. Since the end of the Cold War, most governments (with a few notable exceptions) have agreed that every person has the right to migrate. Yet the second and third questions still deeply divide societies. "While the difficult personal circumstances of most immigrants are very widely recognized and create much sympathy," they note, "immigration restrictions exist largely because many citizens believe that—all humanitarian impulses aside—as a practical matter, we cannot do more (and perhaps must do less)."

Yet statements by American churches—Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Evangelical—often take "the opposite approach, prodding society to do more and admonishing it not to do less," Pistone and Hoeffner observe. Their more generous stance is grounded in biblical materials relevant to migration, like the flight of the holy family into Egypt (Matthew 2:12-23), Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37), and the laws regarding Israel's treatment of resident aliens (e.g., Exodus 23:9; Leviticus 19:33-34; Deuteronomy 10:17-19 and 27:19). Indeed, the Son of Man judges "the nations" positively in another parable: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Matthew 25:35c).

Pistone and Hoeffner discovered that the church statements:

- ▶ *generally agree with the broad public opinion that refugees should be granted asylum.* They tend to disagree on the admission of non-refugees, who are usually economic migrants.
- ▶ *Many churches are calling for greater acceptance of economic migrants, and several say desperately poor immigrants must be accepted.* Nevertheless, all admit "the overall complexity of the issue and



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the right of a nation to control its borders." A number of churches are urging the United States to develop a path to citizenship for undocumented economic migrants.

- ▶ *Most church groups sharply oppose so-called "attrition" laws passed in their states to encourage immigrants to go elsewhere. They fear such laws may criminalize congregations giving basic assistance to undocumented migrants.*

"On many immigration issues, Christian churches do not speak with one voice," Pistone and Hoeffner admit, but "this divergence of views is entirely to be expected and can even be healthy." By listening to one another on these issues, we may discover our assumptions about practical matters are incomplete or mistaken. And we should be patient with people who oppose the church statements with commendable motives. "Support for immigrants is only one aspect of a more general Christian preference for the poor," they write. Some people "may work on behalf of poor non-immigrants and regard immigrants as making life harder for other poor people. [Others]... believe that the best solution to the 'problem' of immigration is to increase economic growth in developing nations.... Committed people of this sort are not opponents, but allies in a larger cause. Churches should do more to recognize them as fellow laborers in the vineyard and take care not to reinforce their alienation."

Study Questions

1. How do the scripture passages cited in the churches' statements apply to the issues of immigration?
2. In your view, what is the thorniest issue related to immigration policy today? What guidance do you find in the church statements that Pistone and Hoeffner review?
3. Is it good for churches to speak out on public issues when they disagree? Or should they wait for agreement?
4. "Perhaps it is healthy for churches to assume that no one is in fact listening" to their public statements, Pistone and Hoeffner write. This belief "may be a blessing in disguise if the result is an increased incentive...to give the hungry something to eat and to invite the stranger in." Do you agree?

Departing Hymn: "Seek the Peace of the City" (vv. 1, 3, and 5)

Seek the peace of the city;
make this land your home.
I have set you here to prosper;
make this land your home.

Seek the peace of the exile,
stranger on the road.
I will walk along beside you,
stranger on the road.

Seek the peace of the city;
find me in this place.
I have brought you here to know me;
find me in this place.

David Wright (2004), © Copyright 2004 David Wright
Tune: SEEK THE PEACE

James E. Clemens (2004), © Copyright 2004 James E. Clemens



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Focus Article:

📖 Faithful Companions
(*Immigration*, pp. 35-43)

Suggested Article:

📖 I Was a Stranger: Jesus
and the Undocumented
Immigrant
(*Immigration*, pp. 63-67)

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Faithful Companions

How can we obey both biblical directives—to be good citizens and to show hospitality to immigrants, legal and illegal? The ISAAC Project is helping churches across the United States work within existing law to assist all immigrants by creating ESL and citizenship classes, family separation ministries, and government “recognized” immigration organizations.

Responsive Prayer

O God of Justice, our world is in turmoil, filled with injustices that threaten the lives of your children in every nation.

Use us as your vessels of justice and mercy in a world longing for liberation.

O God of Hope, you are present in every corner of this world, living within us and among us.

May your Spirit breathe fresh your promise of redemption and deliverance into the hearts of those without peaceful soil and into the hearts of those who would extend mercy. Amen.

Scripture Reading: Matthew 8:5-13

Reflection

Not one, but two ‘strangers’ met in Capernaum. “Jesus was operating on strange turf,” for in Matthew’s Gospel “prior to meeting the centurion, Jesus had been ministering primarily within his own linguistic, ethnic, and religious community,” notes Richard Muñoz. “Our natural inclination is to reach out *first* to those who look, speak, and act like we do,” but this story reminds us Jesus left his comfort zone to care for others. Also the centurion, stationed by the army far from home, was in strange territory. “It must have been difficult for this man of earthly authority to approach Jesus and publicly beg for help. Yet he had to approach the Savior openly and without fear to receive his miracle. His remarkable spiritual journey from a stranger to a participant in the feast of the ‘kingdom of heaven’ started with his willingness to use his newfound knowledge to conquer any fears he may have had about approaching Jesus, the stranger.”

We will need Jesus’ compassion and the centurion’s courage in order to address the needs of immigrants. The Immigration Service and Aid Center (ISAAC) Project, led by attorney Richard Muñoz, gives congregations the tools they need to start and sustain three basic ministries to all immigrants in the United States.

- ▶ *English language training and citizenship education.* The United States Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) requires immigrants who want to become citizens to pass an English proficiency exam and a test over American history and civic procedures. ISAAC connects congregations with adult literacy organizations that provide lesson plans and teaching guides to help immigrants successfully complete these exams.
- ▶ *Family separation ministry.* When “deportable” aliens are apprehended and returned to their country of origin, they may find themselves in a strange land without resources. Muñoz recalls when a pastor contacted ISAAC after “a member of his congregation had been caught in an immigration raid, detained, and ordered to return to his country of origin that he had left *as a child*



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over fifteen years ago.” ISAAC is creating a network of pastors, missionaries, and churches in other countries to receive these newly removed individuals *in their countries of origin*. It also helps American congregations minister to their spouses, children, and extended family that are left behind in the United States.

- *Immigration counseling and processing.* In immigration proceedings, the federal government does not appoint lawyers for immigrants who cannot afford one. Instead it accredits certain individuals “who work for approved non-profit entities...to complete required paperwork and documents for immigrants and, at times, represent them in special immigration courts.” A church may designate persons for this accreditation, if it charges only “nominal fees” for its services and has “at its disposal adequate knowledge, information and experience.” ISAAC helps local churches complete the federal “recognition” process and train their representatives in immigration law and procedure.

“Not every congregation—even a large one—has the volunteer base, resources, time, and facilities to accommodate an immigration ministry,” Muñoz concludes. But when a church is ready, ISAAC can help it to “reach out to those immigrant families torn asunder; provide comfort and a spiritual home to our removed brothers and sisters in Christ; teach newcomers the rich language, history, and hope of our nation; and guide them through a complex and confusing immigration system.”

Study Questions

1. What are the basic needs of most immigrants as they seek United States citizenship? What resources does a local church need in order to be “faithful companions” to them?
2. What strengths displayed by Jesus and the centurion will we need when we minister to strangers?
3. In his article, how does Richard Muñoz address the fear that it would be illegal to minister to undocumented immigrants?

Departing Hymn: “Seek the Peace of the City” (vv. 1, 3, and 5)

Seek the peace of the city;
make this land your home.
I have set you here to prosper;
make this land your home.

Seek the peace of the exile,
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I will walk along beside you,
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Seek the peace of the city;
find me in this place.
I have brought you here to know me;
find me in this place.

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Tune: SEEK THE PEACE

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Focus Article:

📖 Waves of Blessing, Waves of Change
(*Immigration*, pp. 74-83)

Suggested Article:

📖 Immigrant Churches
(*Immigration*, pp. 54-62)

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Waves of Blessing

Surf's up, brothers and sisters! We can ride this wave of migration to America by seeing that God is in the current, adopting mutually dependent ministry postures alongside immigrants, and realizing their contribution to the vitality of the church and the transformation of secular society.

Prayer

Scripture Reading: Leviticus 19:34

Responsive Reading: Psalm 107:1-7[†]

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his love endures forever.

**Let the redeemed of the LORD tell their story –
those he redeemed from the hand of the foe,
those he gathered from the lands,
from east and west, from north and south.**

Some wandered in desert wastelands,
finding no way to a city where they could settle.

They were hungry and thirsty,
and their lives ebbed away.

**Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble,
and he delivered them from their distress.**

**He led them by a straight way
to a city where they could settle.**

Reflection

The "Second Great Wave" of immigration to America is a complex crisscrossing of many smaller waves. Randy White lives in California where "more Mexicans live in Los Angeles than in any city of Mexico, with the exception of Mexico City and Guadalajara. More Cambodians live in Long Beach than in Phnom Penh. More Filipinos live in Daly City than anywhere outside of Manila. Fresno is the Hmong capital of the world outside of Laos, and Central California is the center of Sikh life in the United States." These diverse newcomers are bringing many changes to North American cities and congregations. And White is convinced they will bring a great blessing.

We can begin to glimpse the wonderful possibilities of this "world in motion," White says, when we ask:

- ▶ *How is God at work within this immigration?* Large-scale political and economic migration somehow "creates a spiritual longing and a thirst for God," White notes. As "people intuitively gravitate toward the city in their vulnerability" they bring "belief systems into close contact in a manner that is illuminating. For many [like the Hong and Lao people] coming from animist cultures this provides concrete and liberating examples of another way to view their own lives."
- ▶ *How can we participate in this aspect of God's Kingdom-building?* Churches not only can address newcomers' immediate needs with ESL classes, training courses, childcare, etc., but also give long-term support by "adopting families and providing economic development, working connections, and networking for the benefit of the immigrant community." As we work in schools, the small businesses we own, the legal profession, the Welfare



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Department, or the Police Department, we can offer hospitality to immigrants. The basic thing we can do is to correct the “misinformation and erroneous assumptions [about immigration] which are based on politicized and polarized sentiments within the wider culture.”

- ▶ *How must mono-ethnic middle-class congregations alter their outreach strategies?* White echoes Sharon Stanley’s call to “allow immigrants to determine the forms and the strategies best suited to both meet their needs and encourage their potential.” This may include “contextualized worship, interdependent financial relationships, and shared leadership retreats.” Middle-classes can build Christian leadership in immigrant congregations by sponsoring the education of bi-vocational pastors who serve them.
- ▶ *How do immigrants bring theological vitality to the church and transform secular society?* White says, “God loves the culture-centric, segregated, consumerist, comfortable Western church too much to leave it that way,” and brings immigrant “‘voices from below’ to vitalize and renew it.” New Catholic immigrants’ “high view of God” and “reverence” is reshaping a more casual American Christianity, and their “expressive theology and worship [are] heating up more cold and formal versions of faith and practice.” Latino immigrants place a high value on family unity. Immigrants from animist cultures and Pentecostal Christian traditions call the secular culture “to consider the life of the spirit and the presence and relevance of an invisible, nonmaterial world.”

Study Questions

1. From what countries do immigrants in your community come? What brings these newcomers to your area?
2. In what ways have recent Christian immigrants been a “blessing” to congregations in North America? How can your congregation best support immigrant congregations?
3. How are immigrants transforming North American secular society in a positive way?
4. What amazing contributions did the “First Great Wave” immigrants make to church architecture in Texas, according to Heidi Hornik’s “Immigrant Churches”?

Departing Hymn: “What a Friend We Have in Jesus” (verses 1, 2, and 3)

From all that dwells below the skies,
let the Creator’s praise arise;
let the Redeemer’s name be sung,
through ev’ry land by ev’ry tongue.

Eternal are your mercies, Lord;
eternal truth attends your word;
your praise shall sound from shore to shore,
till suns shall rise and set no more.

Isaac Watts (1674-1748), alt.

Tune: DUKE STREET

† Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, TODAY’S NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. TNIV®. Copyright© 2001, 2005 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan

Appendix: Optional Lesson Plans for Teachers

For each study guide we offer two or three optional lesson plans followed by detailed suggestions on using the material in the study guide:

- ▶ An *abridged lesson plan* outlines a lesson suitable for a beginning Bible study class or a brief group session.
- ▶ A *standard lesson plan* outlines a more thorough study.
- ▶ For some guides a *dual session lesson plan* divides the study guide material so that the group can explore the topic in two meetings.

Each lesson plan is for a 30- to 45-minute meeting, with about one-third of the time being set aside for worship.

Loving Our Neighbors, Both Far and Near

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Meditation	Meditation
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 3 and 4	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To sketch a Christian moral framework for conducting immigration debates.
2. To center attention on the key moral issue in immigration policy, which is whether and why citizens are permitted to restrict access to the life that they share.
3. To examine the moral ground and the limits of special obligations we have toward fellow citizens.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 2-3 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Immigration (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn “O God, In Whom We Live and Move” locate the familiar tune GERMANY or OLD 100th in your church’s hymnal or on the Web at www.cyberhymnal.org.

Begin with an Observation

Why did Paul expend his life as a missionary on behalf of others? “The love of Christ urges us on,” he explained to the Corinthian Christians, “because we are convinced that one has died for all” (2 Corinthians 5:14). This motive is a recurring theme throughout *The Love of Christ Toward Migrants* (2004), which calls us to assist both immigrants and the nations that welcome them:

The love of Christ towards migrants urges us (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:14) to look afresh at their problems, which are to be met with today all over the world. In fact nearly all countries are now faced with the eruption of the migration phenomenon in one aspect or another; it affects their social, economic, political and religious life and is becoming more and more a permanent structural phenomenon. Migration is often determined by a free decision of the migrants themselves, taken fairly frequently not only for economic reasons but also for cultural, technical or scientific motives. As such it is for the most part a clear indication of social, economic and demographic imbalance on a regional or world-wide level, which drives people to emigrate....

The challenge confronting us in today’s migrations is not an easy one because many different spheres are involved: economics, sociology, politics, health, culture and security. All Christians must respond to this challenge; it is not just a matter of good will or the personal charisma [or, gifted calling] of a few.

Erga migrantes caritas Christi [The love of Christ towards migrants] (Vatican City, Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, 2004), online at www.vatican.va.

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God to give the group discernment as you prayerfully study the key moral issues in immigration policy.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Acts 17:22-28 from a modern translation.

Meditation

Invite members to reflect on the meditation during a period of silence.

Reflection

This study lays the groundwork for understanding and debating immigration policies through the biblical command to love our neighbors as ourselves. Peter Meilaender assumes we must care for immigrants – the “far” neighbors in his article title – by defending their opportunities to migrate for a variety of good reasons. He develops a case for drawing proper restrictions on legal immigration, for in this way we may care for fellow citizens – our “near” neighbors. He offers no simple guideline for balancing care for immigrants and fellow citizens. But in the love for all neighbors, both far and near, our reflection on immigration must begin.

Study Questions

1. Paul’s speech on the Areopagus (or, Mars Hill) in Athens points at once to both the wonderful unity of the human family (“From one ancestor [God] made all nations to inhabit the whole earth”) and the value and integrity of specific human cultures (“and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live”) (Acts 17:26). We might restate Peter Meilaender’s framework in these Pauline terms: we care for immigrants because they are our brothers and sisters in one human family, and we care for fellow citizens not only for this reason, but also because God chooses to shape and bless us through them in a particular community whose identity we come to share.
2. Meilaender briefly outlines the recent history of U.S. immigration in the following way. (For more information, see Roger Daniels’s *Coming to America*, which Viviana Triana reviews in “Back to the Basics of Immigration” in the *Immigration* issue.) Immigration slowed dramatically when restrictive laws were passed in 1921 and 1924. Numbers rose slowly in the mid 1950s because of “growing awareness of the consequences of countries’ not having accepted Jewish refugees during the Holocaust; the gathering civil rights movement, whose focus on racial equality was hard to square with immigration quotas based on ethnicity; and a Cold War desire to attract immigrants fleeing the communist bloc.” The Immigration Act of 1965 loosened restrictions by eliminating national origins quotas and allowing current citizens and legal residents to sponsor their relatives for immigration, sometimes in excess of the new annual cap on the number of immigrants. “Without changes, there is no reason to expect immigration levels to decline in the near future,” Meilaender concludes; “even were illegal immigration to vanish tomorrow, legal immigration would continue to be at historically high levels.”
3. Meilaender believes God “gifts” us with the particular circumstances of our lives, including the specific “near” neighbors for whom we should care in “the national communities into which we ‘happen’ to be born.” He does not believe “God must wish everything to be precisely as it is,” but only that “we should not regard the circumstances of our lives as mere biographical data of no moral significance.... Human charity is necessarily filtered through the prism of time and place.” He gives an analogy of loving the particular person who is his daughter, gifted to him and his wife for their special care.

Encourage members to explore the limits of Meilaender’s point. For instance, what do we owe to people who were born in less fortunate national communities?

4. Divide members into groups to review Meilaender’s proposals about these four categories of immigrants: people who need asylum, relatives of current citizens, illegal immigrants already residing in the country, and people who have economically valuable skills. He notes that asylees make strong claims on our care based on their need; he favors the second and third groups because they (or their relatives) are “nearer” neighbors living among us.

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Ruth: Resident Alien with a Face

Lesson Plans

Abridged Plan	Standard Plan
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To understand distinctions among type of immigrants in ancient Israel.
2. To imaginatively apply lessons from the story of Ruth to welcoming immigrants today.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 4-5 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Immigration (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn "There's a Wideness in God's Mercy" locate the familiar tune WELLESLEY in your church's hymnal or on the Web at www.cyberhymnal.org.

Begin with a Story

Michael Moore recalls telephoning Eduardo, who was one of his brightest students, to find out why he had not sent in his term paper. "The response he offered was a little unnerving. He said he had been staying up late every night the past two weeks watching the World Cup on ESPN. Why? Because he *needed* to know how Honduras (his native country) was doing in the first rounds of play. Because of this he just 'couldn't find the time' to write his paper. When I informed him that failure to produce a paper would mean failure of the course, he said, 'I understand,' thanked me for the call, and hung up." Moore found it difficult to understand his student's priorities. He writes, "Only slowly did I begin to realize how wide the canyon had grown between our worldviews: a first-generation immigrant, he found the English reading and writing assignments very difficult; a seasoned seminary professor, I felt it my responsibility to help him learn the Word of God in its original historical and literary contexts. When two cultures clash like this it is tempting for the dominant culture to conclude that immigrants like Eduardo are ignorant and lazy."

This story reminds us that as immigrants of diverse cultures come to live among us, we need discerning hearts to appreciate their needs and honor their contributions. There is a happy ending to the story. Imaginatively drawing on the perspective on immigrants he finds in the book of Ruth, Moore "called Eduardo back and asked him if he would prefer to sit for an oral final exam in his native language, and then got a translator to mediate for us. Not only did he pass the course, the two of us experienced a taste of how good it feels when God's chesed 'becomes flesh and dwells among us, full of grace and truth.'" (*Immigration*, 20, 25)

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by reading the prayer in the study guide in unison.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Ruth 1:22-2:23 from a modern translation.

Reflection

The book of Ruth has three richly nuanced characters: Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz. Michael Moore focuses on Boaz because he discerns the intentions and character of Ruth, the Moabite immigrant, and graciously welcomes her into the community of Israel. You might read the entire book of Ruth (it contains only 84 verses), or have members summarize the parts of the story before and after the scripture reading from 1:22-2:23. Summarize the

actions of the Danites in destroying the innocent village of Laish (Judges 18), because Moore contrasts these foreigners to Ruth. Ruth's own ethnic group, the Moabites, were shunned as foreigners (Ruth 2:10; cf. Deuteronomy 23:3 and Nehemiah 13:1-3) because of their past mistreatment of the people of Israel.

Study Questions

1. God blesses Ruth through discerning individuals like Naomi and Boaz, but notice that these characters do not act in isolation, but come to know and care for Ruth through intricate social networks and institutions. Naomi trusts the judgment of her son-in-law Mahlon in marrying the foreign-born Ruth, and she urges Ruth to trust Boaz because he is a kinsman on her husband's side. Boaz trusts the judgment of his foreman concerning Ruth, and he negotiates her security through the social institution of levirate marriage.

God blesses Naomi and Boaz through Ruth's love, all the people of Israel through her great-grandson, King David, who brings security to the community, and all the people of God through her descendent Joseph, who nurtures the Messiah (Ruth 4:17; Matthew 1:5).

2. Some immigrants who are driven by greed and selfishness will not seek the common good, and others who are motivated by an ideology may try to harm our country. So, yes, we have reason to be wary of *some* foreigners, as Israel was wary of the "Danites." Yet, most immigrants are not like this. Instead, they are "Ruths" whose reasons for immigrating are understandable and honorable, and potential contributions to our society are good.

In the story, Boaz is willing to bracket the fact that Ruth is a Moabite. He accepts the report of his foreman who admires Ruth's work and respect for the laws of Israel. "All the assembly of my people know that you are a worthy woman," Boaz tells Ruth when they finally meet (Ruth 3:11). Then Boaz gets to know Ruth and judges her for himself.

Ask members to list the traits of character that a "Boaz" must have: courage to meet those who are different, willingness to listen to friends who know the strangers' stories, ability to evaluate character, compassionate, open to friendship with others, able to see God's blessing in their work, etc. How can your congregation encourage such traits in its members? Do trusted missionaries or travelers share their experiences in worship? Do members welcome immigrant friends into positions of leadership?

3. Due to our increasing vigilance against terrorism after 9/11, we may judge immigrants from Middle Eastern countries harshly. In neighborhoods where many immigrants with a common heritage gather and create their own institutions, we may fear they will not loyally support their new country. These are two ways that by fearing the "Danites," we fail to recognize the "Ruths" living among us. Encourage members to reflect on the immigrants who live in their local community. Which individuals (or groups) have they easily known and accepted? Is this because the immigrants share our heritage, language, and customs, or have a common educational and professional background? How can members of your congregation come to know the immigrants who are more different from them and isolated within the local community?
4. Dan Royer's family emigrated from the United States to Canada where he served as pastor of a church in the village of Selkirk, Ontario, for several years. He recalls church members helping him learn seemingly incidental aspects of the culture – a new vocabulary and customs – and pitching in many other ways to make his ministry successful. I found it interesting that he mentions how many people let him into their lives to help them. To turn this point around, the Canadian congregants allowed the immigrant, as naïve as he was about his new country, to minister to them.

Encourage members to share their stories of welcoming immigrants (by caring for them, but also allowing them to be care-givers) or being welcomed themselves as immigrants.

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

A More Perfect Union

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>	<i>Dual Session (#1)</i>	<i>Dual Session (#2)</i>
Responsive Prayer	Responsive Prayer	Responsive Prayer	Responsive Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading	Matthew 25:31-46
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)	Reflection (all sections)	Discuss statements by your church body
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)	Questions 1 and 3	Question 2 and 4
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To survey the public statements on immigration policy by churches in the United States.
2. To discuss how they challenge public opinion and sometimes disagree among themselves.
3. To provide group members an opportunity to grapple with the contentious issues of immigration policy in a prayerful and productive way.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 6-7 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide.

Distribute copies of *Immigration (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article before the group meeting.

Begin with an Observation

“Some scholars have referred to our time as the ‘age of migration,’” Daniel Groody, C.S.C., writes. “More people are migrating around the world than ever before in human history. Largely because of changes precipitated by globalization, the number is twice as large as it was twenty-five years ago. Today nearly 200 million people are on the move, which is roughly the equivalent of the population of Brazil, the fifth largest country on the planet. Of these, approximately thirty to forty million are undocumented, twenty-four million are internally displaced, and almost ten million are refugees....

Such flows of people cause much conflict and controversy. Amidst the ensuing clash of cultures, identities, and religions, there is a great need to sort out the conceptual issues of immigration and to design just and humane policies that respond to the pressing needs of the new migrants—some of the most vulnerable people living on the planet” (*Immigration*, 89).

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by reading together the responsive prayer in the study guide. The leader begins and the group reads the lines in bold print.

Scripture Reading

Ask two group members to read Deuteronomy 24:14-15 and 17-22 from a modern translation.

Reflection

American churches have not been silent on contentious immigration issues; often they have challenged public opinion by calling for more generous immigration policies. Yet, the churches disagree among themselves and some individual Christians disagree with their church’s statements. So, in this study you should expect and allow group members to disagree with one another. Even if we all seek to love our neighbors, far and near, we will have difficult practical policies to work out. Recall Michelle Pistone and John Hoeffner’s concluding advice: “For our union to become more perfect, churches must continue to *talk about* and *walk with* immigrants, as we

all struggle to learn which of our current imperfections are necessary products of our time and which could be presently overcome with greater commitment and imagination.”

You might extend this discussion to two sessions. In the second session, distribute the statements on immigration produced by your state and national church bodies for members to review and discuss. (They will be available on denominational Web sites.) How do those statements address the three basic questions about immigration: “Who has the right to immigrate?” “Where can individuals immigrate?” and “How should immigrants be treated in receiving countries?” How do the statements challenge the wider public opinion? Do members think the statements are entirely persuasive or in need of further reflection?

Study Questions

1. Form small groups to some of these scripture passages: the laws regarding Israel’s treatment of resident aliens (e.g., Exodus 23:9; Leviticus 19:33-34; Deuteronomy 10:17-19 and 27:19), the flight of the holy family into Egypt (Matthew 2:12-23), the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37), and the parable of the Judgment of the Nations (Matthew 25:31-46). Since the Bible is not a rulebook for social issues, we should not expect any of these passages to mention immigration directly. Yet each passage has an indirect application to the issues of immigration policy. Members might mention that God expected his chosen nation of Israel to care for strangers, and the Son of Man will judge all nations according to their treatment of strangers; that God in Christ suffered as a refugee; and that Jesus praises the compassion of the Samaritan who personally cared for a stranger. Personal (and societal) forms of hospitality to strangers are not an option for people who live in the story of God.

[If you extend this discussion to two sessions, you may use Matthew 25:31-46 as the focal scripture reading for the second session and encourage members to explore scripture passages in their own church’s statements that they review.]

2. As members explore the complexities of (national and local) issues surrounding immigration, encourage them to seek wisdom in the church statements. The “thorniest” (i.e., *most contentious*) issue may be what rights and opportunities countries should grant to certain economic immigrants – especially those who are undocumented, or who are indigent, and so on. On the other hand, the “thorniest” (i.e., *most likely to conflict with basic Christian ministries*) issue may be responding to the “attrition” laws passed by some cities and states, because some of these laws threaten to make it illegal to assist undocumented immigrants with their basic needs in housing, health care, job training, transportation, and so on.
3. While churches should agree on the gospel, they may disagree on its application to complicated public issues like immigration. Pistone and Hoeffner think churches should continue to speak out even when they disagree. On the one hand, they can learn from each other and correct one another’s errors in judgment. “Immigration is an immensely complicated field,” they note, “and our determinations about it often are necessarily based on prudential judgments involving subject matters on which churches have no special institutional competence. Hence, alternative views on immigration among Christian churches can present an opportunity to learn.” A second reason is that “our awareness of differing views can be useful in making plain the sometimes hidden assumptions that underlie our own opinions. And sometimes we may learn that our assumptions about prudential matters are incomplete or even mistaken.” Finally, they note that individuals may agree on the nature of a problem, but weigh the value of competing solutions differently – e.g., one may think it best to address the problem of economic migration through a more open immigration policy in receiving nations, but another prefers to enhance the economies of the sending nations. Similarly church bodies may weigh the value of competing solutions differently; this type of disagreement invites them to seek a more inclusive solution.
4. Pistone and Hoeffner believe Christian churches prophetically witness to the gospel through their way of life as well as by their thoughtful contributions to public debates. Prophecy is not merely actions or words; it is *both*.

Departing Hymn

“Seek the Peace of the City” is on pp. 44-45 of *Immigration*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Faithful Companions

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Responsive Prayer	Responsive Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To understand how congregations can work within the law to provide essential ministries to all immigrants, legal and illegal, in the United States.
2. To interpret Matthew's account of Jesus' encounter with the Roman centurion, from both men's perspectives, as a framework for our ministry to immigrants.
3. To introduce the work of the Immigration Service and Aid Center (ISAAC) Project in assisting congregations to start and sustain an immigration ministry.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 8-9 and ask members to read the Bible passages in the guide. Distribute copies of *Immigration (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting.

Begin with an Observation

In 2003, Cardinal Stephen Fumio Hamao of Japan poignantly described "the experience of the majority of migrants" in this way: "When a person in need is in a strange country, where he does not understand the language and much less know its culture and legislation, he is in a very vulnerable position. Even in the country of arrival, where he had high hopes of a better life, he can easily fall victim to the abuse of his human rights.... Migrants and refugees are in fact easy prey to exploitation, and, in extreme cases, also to human trafficking. They are therefore often victims of violence, maybe not always physical, but very often psychological and moral, as in cases of marginalization and exclusion, discrimination, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance. They are often made 'scapegoats' for local unemployment or criminal activities."

His observation reminds us that lawfully assisting all immigrants, legal and illegal, is an important part of the Church's mission to care for the most vulnerable human beings.

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by reading together the responsive prayer in the study guide. The leader begins and the group reads the lines in bold print.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Matthew 8:5-13 from a modern translation.

Reflection

This study will help members articulate the needs of immigrants in your area and survey your congregation's resources (volunteer base, money, time, and facilities) for starting and sustaining a church-based immigration ministry. Since a church-based immigration ministry may serve some newcomers who are undocumented, attorney Richard Muñoz addresses in his article some common misconceptions and fears you may have about federal human trafficking and smuggling statutes that prohibit unlawful "transporting," "harboring," and

“encouraging” of undocumented aliens in the United States.

For more information on all of these topics and for assistance in starting in immigration ministry that is “recognized” by the United States government, consult the ISAAC Project Web site (www.isaacproject.com). Cooperatively founded by the Baptist General Convention of Texas (www.bgct.org) and Buckner Children and Family Services (www.bucknerchildren.org), the Immigration Service and Aid Center (“ISAAC”) Project helps churches work within existing law to help all immigrants – not just undocumented ones – with some basic needs.

Study Questions

1. Immigrants often need (1) educational assistance to prepare for the English proficiency and citizenship exams given by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS), and (2) legal assistance to interpret complex immigration rules and regulations and to prepare for federal immigration proceedings. Many undocumented immigrants who are deported need (3) assistance in relocating within their countries of origin and support for their spouses, children, and extended family members who are left behind in the United States.

Divide members into three groups to survey your congregation’s resources (volunteer base, money, time, and facilities) for these three types of assistance. You might begin with only one type, or combine resources with another congregation to provide a full-orbed ministry. According to the Census Bureau, the top ten countries of origin for immigrants to the United States in 1996 were Mexico, Philippines, India, Vietnam, China, Dominican Republic, Cuba, Ukraine, Russia, and Jamaica. Of course, a congregation-based immigration ministry would be hard pressed to provide family separation ministry to immigrants from all of these countries, but it could focus on one or two groups in their local community.

2. Richard Muñoz invites us to emulate both Jesus and the centurion. Jesus, according to the Gospel of Matthew, ministers for the first time to people outside his ethnic group. Likewise the centurion in the Roman army conquers his fear and trusts a stranger to minister to him. Which do you think is more difficult – to trust a stranger to whom we minister, or to trust a stranger to help us as a channel of God’s grace in our time of need?
3. Immigration ministries usually assist undocumented newcomers, often intentionally, but at least inadvertently, Muñoz notes, since “federal law does *not* require you to verify the citizenship or immigration status of the members of your congregation or beneficiaries of your benevolence.” Is benevolence to undocumented immigrants a violation of federal laws that prohibit unlawful “transporting,” “harboring,” and “encouraging” undocumented aliens in the United States? Muñoz clarifies common misconceptions about these laws, though he notes his “discussion of these laws is not intended to be legal advice pertaining to your specific situation and should not be construed as such. It is for educational and informational purposes only.” He notes these interpretations of key terms by federal courts:

- *Transporting*: “Willful transportation of illegal aliens is not, per se, a violation of the statute, for the law proscribes such conduct only when it is in furtherance of the alien’s unlawful presence.” Muñoz says in each case “a court will determine whether conduct is ‘in furtherance of such violation of the law’ by looking at the defendant’s intent and whether there is a direct or substantial relationship between that transportation and its furtherance of the alien’s presence in the United States.”
- *Harboring*: This is an “activity tending *substantially to facilitate* an alien’s remaining in the United States illegally,” and “[i]mplicit in the wording ‘harbor, shield, or conceal,’ is the connotation that something is being hidden from detection.”
- *Encouraging*: This “relates to actions taken to convince the illegal alien to come to this country or to stay in this country.” Some examples are engaging in document fraud and facilitating unlawful entry into the United States.

Muñoz encourages each local congregation to “understand the legal environment in which it exists” in regard to assisting immigrants, “and then, like the centurion, use this new knowledge to overcome its fears and act responsibly for the good of the Kingdom.”

Departing Hymn

“Seek the Peace of the City” is on pp. 44-45 of *Immigration*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Waves of Blessing

Lesson Plans

Abridged Plan	Standard Plan
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Responsive Reading	Responsive Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1, 2, and 3	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To reflect on how God is at work in the current wave of immigration to North America.
2. To consider how recent immigrants are contributing to the vitality of the church and the positive transformation of secular society.
3. To introduce the work of the Immigration Service and Aid Center (ISAAC) Project in assisting congregations to start and sustain an immigration ministry.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 10-11 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Immigration (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn “From All That Dwells below the Sky” locate the familiar tune DUKE STREET in your church’s hymnal or on the Web at www.cyberhymnal.org.

Begin with an Observation

The life of literature teacher André Jacques (1925-2006) changed forever in 1968 when he accepted a call to lead a student center for refugees and migrants in France. Later, as secretary for migration at the World Council of Churches, “he anticipated many of the challenges which are now seen on the global agenda,” recalls WCC general secretary Samuel Kobia. “He was a defender of human rights and an indefatigable campaigner for the rights of refugees and migrants whoever they were and wherever they came from.” In 1985, Jacques wrote:

Establishing true partnerships with [migrants and refugees] means recognizing and respecting their identity and their capacity. It means helping them to help themselves whenever possible, often by assisting them with the formation of organizations of their own where they can better identify their priorities and find solutions. In other words, it means allowing the uprooted to develop fully, wherever they are, as individuals and as communities.

The individual and collective responsibility of Christians toward aliens is to take measures to enable them again to be *subjects and not objects* of history. By welcoming strangers, which implies considering them as partners, and by taking action in the public arena, the church makes its struggle for justice, God’s will for all, more authentic and credible.

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God to reveal how he is active in bringing good from the transitions caused by both political and economic migration

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Leviticus 19:34 from a modern translation.

Responsive Reading

The leader begins and the group reads the lines in bold print.

Reflection

The “water” metaphors for immigration — “a Second *Great Wave* of immigration,” “a *rising tide* of immigrants,” “more newcomers than the country can *absorb*,” etc. — usually connote danger and destruction. Randy White cleverly turns them in a positive direction with the metaphor of ocean surfing, where a “great wave” is complex, challenging, and potentially valuable. White’s article focuses on the amazing opportunities God is bringing to the church in North America through recent immigration. Heidi Hornik’s reflection on the “painted churches” of Texas reminds us of the long history of God’s working through the lives of immigrant Christians.

Study Questions

1. Reflect on the country of origin profile of immigrants in your town, region, or state. The United States Census Bureau’s American Community Survey gathers this data for each state and region; this information is presented in useful charts by The Pew Hispanic Center in *A Statistical Portrait of the Foreign-Born Population at Mid-Decade* (2005), available online at pewhispanic.org/reports/foreignborn. Are immigrants drawn to your community because of proximity to their country of origin, transportation corridors (airplane, boat, or automobile routes), historical ties of their people to your region, work in particular industries, etc.?
2. Randy White mentions contributions such as their more joyful and less formal styles of worship, reverent attitudes toward God, appreciation for spiritual community, deepened awareness of the role of suffering in the Christian life, living out their faith without dependence on wealth, and so on. Encourage members to discuss the contributions of specific Christian immigrant communities in your area.
Are there many foreign-born members in your congregation? If so, what drew them to your Christian community? Does your congregation sponsor an immigrant church if differences of language and customs of worship are a barrier to common worship? Discuss how your congregation might cooperate with other churches and Christian organizations to encourage the immigrant churches in your region.
3. White mentions that Latino immigrants place a high value on family unity, and that Pentecostal Christian immigrants and people from traditions that are animist strongly believe in the nonmaterial world. You might discuss Amitai Etzioni’s view (quoted in *Immigration*, 73): “A large number of immigrants, many from Mexico and other South American countries (and to a lesser extent from Asia), are making the United States more communitarian than it has been in recent decades by fostering a stronger commitment to family, community, and nation, as well as respect for authority and moderate religious-moral values.... Their high intermarriage rates serve as but one example of this positive modification, for through intermarriage Hispanic and Asian immigrants help insure that the most intimate ties — those of family — will prevent American society from breaking down along ethnic lines.”
4. Heidi Hornik describes Saints Cyril and Methodius Church in Shiner, Texas. About the remarkable “painted churches” in Texas she writes, “Their sanctuaries adorned with a surprising profusion of color, these houses of worship are part of the valued and continuing legacy of the Czech and German immigrants — mainly Catholic, but also Brethren and Lutheran — who settled frontier towns like Ammansville and Dubina, High Hill and Praha, Schulenberg and Shiner, West and Fredericksburg, stretching from the Gulf Coast inland to the Hill Country of central Texas.” The Czech immigrants who established Saints Cyril and Methodius Church were in the “First Great Wave” of immigration to America in the last decades of the nineteenth century. The building that Hornik studied — their parish’s second house of worship — was constructed thirty years after the community was founded.
Have immigrants in the Second Great Wave made similar contributions? Or will these emerge as their immigrant communities become more established in the United States?

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.