

Sample Program Design: Immigration in the U. S. through the Lens of Faith

The intent of these sessions is to engage issues surrounding immigration from a theological perspective. Staying in conversation, while respecting people's right to hold varying views on the issues encourages us to be informed by the facts and governed by the values and teaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Using any of these suggested resources, you can conduct several short adult forums or create a day long workshop.

Undoubtedly, these issues are emotional and controversial. Thus, it is essential to these sessions to express guidelines that encourage respectful conversation versus falling into debate. Guidelines for conversation are available widely; use one with which you are familiar or contact Ayliffe Mumford at the School of Ministry for assistance.

Materials needed:

- Notice of Pastoral Letter from House of Bishops—The Rt. Rev. Michael B. Curry
- Pastoral Letter from the House of Bishops, dated September 21, 2010.
- “The Nation and the Common Good: Reflections on Immigration Reform” A theological resource on migration and immigration.
- *For You Were Once a Stranger*: An eight-week study guide on immigration for people of faith from the North Carolina Council of Churches (this resource is available as hard copy or electronically. Refer to the School of Ministry website, episdioncschool.org for details.

Program Design

Begin and end each session with prayer. Be prepared to offer appropriate scripture to frame conversations (suggestions in *For You Were Once a Stranger*, Appendix A).

Use any of the required materials. Prior to attending, ask attendees to read whichever resource you will be using for that session.

After the opening prayer and the review of conversation norms (see above), ask attendees generally what they learned through their reading. What was new to them, what reinforced a view they already hold, what caused them discomfort.

There are very good reflection questions in the Council of Churches booklet, *For You Were Once a Stranger*. Use these as the basis to continue your conversations.

If your session is attended by more than eight people, break into smaller conversation groups. This will ensure that people will have the opportunity to speak and be heard. Consider having a facilitator at each table or move around the room yourself to reinforce the guidelines for conversation and the theological foundation. Ask a question to help generate more thinking and interaction among the group.

Re-assemble the group for the final ten to fifteen minutes to reflect together on what new ideas and thoughts come up in the group conversation(s). Most importantly, how does their faith inform them as they engage this issue?

Assign another section/chapter for the next session. Close with prayer.

Optional Materials:

- *All God's Children*: A DVD produced at Holy Trinity in Greensboro in 2008. Five lectures on immigration from theological, legal and moral perspectives.
- A movie that depicts immigration and its issues; see possible options below.

Suggestions for using the optional materials:

See synopsis of the lectures on *All God's Children* on School of Ministry website. View a segment at the beginning of session; compare and contrast with the assigned reading.

Suggest that people host a "movie night" at their home. A list of possible choices is below but there are many others. Following the viewing of the film ask them to reflect together on it. Use the above design or come up with specific questions for the film.

Crossing Arizona (2005) A documentary presented at the 2006 Sundance Film Festival, this film explores escalating tensions over illegal immigration at their epicenter - the Arizona / Sonora border. Human rights, national security, class, and culture are explored through the personal experiences of the locals on both sides of the border in this balanced look at the issues. Directed by Joseph Mathew.

DeNADIE (2005) Presented in the World Documentary category at Sundance 2006, this film comes from Mexico and follows the path traced by many leaving South and Central America bound for freedoms and opportunities too basic to be rightfully exclusive. A filmmaking neophyte, Tin Dirdamal approaches the medium with the sensitivity and skill of a veteran, drawing us into the oft-told story of immigrant hardships, presenting it in a way that makes it more real and personal than we possibly could have understood before.

La Tragedia de Macario (2005) Writer, director, editor Pablo Véliz brought this immigrant story to Sundance 2006 for its world premiere. In the title role, Rogelio Ramos is drawn to the U.S. to find a better life for his wife in this Spanish language film. Joined by his best friend, the two set out on the dangerous journey undertaken by so many each year. Véliz's insight is the desperation that drives them and the spirituality that sustains them as they risk their lives.

The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada (2005) Tommy Lee Jones (Men in Black 1997) stars in and directs this unusual movie about promises, both kept and broken, and redemption. The truest expression of love in the film is between Texas cowboy, Pete (Jones), and his best friend, Melquiades (Julio Cesar Cedillo), who has illegally crossed the border for work. Barry Pepper gives a startling performance as the heartless CBP officer.

Under the Same Moon (2007) Heartwarming story about a mother who leaves Mexico to make a home for herself and her son (Adrian Alonso). When the boy's grandmother dies, leaving him alone, he sets off on his own to find his mother (Kate del Castillo). Directed by Patricia Riggen. Fox Searchlight purchased this film at the Sundance Film Festival. Recognizing that this theme is more than just the plot for a movie, the film's website has provided links to organizations that help to reunite separated immigrant families.

The Visitor (2007) Walter Vale (Richard Jenkins) is a lonely economics professor in Connecticut. His life is changed forever - and for the better - when he finds a couple of illegals, who happen to be living in his New York apartment. Directed by Tom McCarthy (The Station Agent 2003).

Goodbye Solo (2008) This film by American writer / director Ramin Bahrani is touching and humorous. It is the story of an unlikely friendship between Solo (Souléyman Sy Savané), a struggling but happy cab driver from Senegal, and William (Red West), a tormented southern man with secrets. Filmed in and around Winston-Salem.

Gran Torino (2008) Walt Kowalski (Clint Eastwood) is an iron-willed veteran living in a changing world, who is forced by his immigrant neighbors to confront his own long-held prejudices.

These and other films were compiled at <http://www.murthy.com/immigration-in-the-movies/> All are available on Netflix.