

## Lenten Courageous Conversations – Immigrants (Week 1) By Scott Hughes, Director of Adult Discipleship

Baptismal Question: Do you **renounce** the spiritual forces of wickedness,  
reject the evil powers of this world,  
and repent of your sin?

### Overview

Lent is a forty-day period of self-reflection, contemplation, and reconciliation. Lent is also traditionally a season connected with preparing for baptism or reaffirmation of the baptismal covenant. The following Lenten Courageous Conversation is an attempt to relate the vows made in baptism with people who are or could be feeling estranged. In particular, this series of lessons will focus on immigrants (documented and undocumented) who often suffer in isolation due to language, culture, and even fear.

*The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church* invites us to consider: “Reflecting upon the Scriptures, we are reminded that United Methodists are a global church. In the United States, we may be descendants of economic immigrants or forced migrants, or we may have recently arrived in the US. We may have formal documents proving US citizenship, or we may be undocumented. Regardless of legal status or nationality, we are connected through Christ to one another.”<sup>1</sup>

### Method

The approach for the Lenten Courageous Conversation begins with an interview in the first session and then allows for more discussion in the succeeding sessions. Feel free to adapt the time and other variables as needed for your context. To set the stage properly for each session, think through the setting of the room and any technical logistics beforehand. Proper attention to these details displays intentionality and provides order to the conversations. Each session is bracketed by a vow from the baptismal liturgy. These should be emphasized and frame each session.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church, 2012* (Copyright © 2012. The United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission), 390.

## Estimated Timeline

The following is based on a 45- to 60-minute timeframe.

Opening Prayer (3 minutes)

Overview (5 minutes)

Setting Aside Baggage (5 minutes)

Interviews in the Presence of the Whole Group (30 minutes)

Small-Group Reflection (10 minutes)

Large-Group Reflective Exercise (5 minutes)

Closing Prayer (2 minutes)

## Lenten Courageous Conversation

### ❖ Opening Prayer

- Begin with silence and/or the lighting of a candle to represent God's presence. This time of silence is important to center the group and mark the space and time as unique. Have a copy of the prayer for everyone to follow along or participate in the prayer. ([For examples, see this link.](#))

### ❖ Overview

- Give an overview of the main topic of discussion and its connection to Lent. Have the group recite the baptismal vow emphasis for this week. Point out and read the conversation guidelines. Reinforce that this is a safe place for people to freely express their opinions and perspectives.

### ❖ Setting Aside Baggage

- Form people into small groups, with a maximum of three people to a group. Allow each participant no more than two minutes to finish the sentence:
  - What I hope for this Lenten season is...

### ❖ Interviews in the Presence of the Whole Group

- Interviews
  - Find someone(s) in your community (church and/or local community) who has immigrated and/or has experience with immigration. This could be a lawyer, judge, social worker, government employee, and/or someone who has been in ministry with immigrants or refugees. There can be a panel of interviewees or if necessary, just one interviewee. Designate one well-respected person to conduct the interview. The questioner, ideally, will be someone with interviewing skills and a person who is seen as neutral pertaining to the

outcome. The focus of the interview(s) should be on immigration, why people immigrate, the process of citizenship, and local concerns.

- If time permits, move into a time for the interviewees to ask questions. These can be verbal or written questions submitted to the interviewer. The aim is for learning, not for advancing opinions.

#### ❖ Reflective Small-Group Time

- If time permits, have participants break into smaller groups of about four to five people for each group. Have a recorder in each group record answers to the second question.
- Print out and/or display the following questions:
  - How has this issue had an impact on you or someone you know?
  - What are you most curious about regarding immigration?

#### ❖ Large-Group Reflective Exercise

- Before ending, allow any participant who would like to answer in one sentence,
  - In light of what we have heard, how can we (as a congregation and as individuals) rely on God's grace to "**renounce** the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of [our] sin?"
  - In light of what we have heard about immigrants and immigration, in what ways do we believe God might be calling us (as a congregation and as individuals) to "**renounce** the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of [our] sin?"

#### ❖ Closing Prayer

- End with silence and/or the lighting of a candle to represent God's presence. Have a copy of the prayer for everyone to follow along or participate in the prayer. ([For examples, see this link.](#))

## Lenten Courageous Conversations – Immigrants (Week 2)

Baptismal Question: Do you **accept** the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?

### Estimated Timeline

The following is based on a 45- to 60-minute timeframe. Adjust as needed.

Opening Prayer (3 minutes)

Overview (5 minutes)

Setting Aside Baggage (5 minutes)

Biblical and Theological Reflection (30 minutes)

Large-Group Reflective Exercise (5 minutes)

Closing Prayer (2 minutes)

### Lenten Courageous Conversation

#### ❖ Opening Prayer

#### ❖ Overview

- Give an overview of the main topic of discussion: The church's ministry with immigrants. Have the group recite the baptismal vow emphasis for this week. Point out and read the conversation guidelines. Reinforce that this is a safe place for people to freely express their opinions and perspectives.

#### ❖ Setting Aside Baggage

- Form people into small groups, with a maximum of three people to a group. Allow each participant no more than two minutes to finish the following sentence:
  - One thing I learned or that has stuck with me from last week's session is...Then allow each participant to answer the following question:
  - How has this issue had an impact on you or someone you know?
- Remind the participants that this is a time of naming and listening, not for discussing; that will come later.

## ❖ Biblical and Theological Reflection

- Biblical (together as one group)
  - Have a participant read
    - I Corinthians 12:26 – Being first and foremost united in Christ, our love for fellow Christians transcends political and geographic boundaries
    - Matthew 2:13-18 – Jesus and his earthy family had to flee to Egypt due to King Herod’s policy of infanticide.
    - Hebrews 13:2 – We often encounter God’s grace when we extend hospitality and interact with the least, lowest, and lost.
  
- Small-Group Reflection
  - Form people into smaller groups of four to six people.
    - Allow each person to take turns reflecting on the passages that have been read. Use time limits and a talking stick to allow every participant an equal opportunity to participate.
    - Allow participants to identify other biblical passages that inform their beliefs regarding immigrants and immigration policy.
  
- Theological Reflection: Social Principles – “Rights of Immigrants” (together as one group)
  - Print out a copy for each participant of ¶162 section H on “Rights of Immigrants” and ¶163 section F on “Foreign Workers” from *The Book of Discipline*. Have one participant read section H and another read section F aloud.
  - Have participants read the following selections from *The Book of Resolutions*:
    - “From the dawn of creation human beings have migrated across the earth. The history of the United States is a migration narrative of families and individuals seeking safety, economic betterment, and freedom of religious and cultural expression...Migrants today continue to travel to North America because of the effects of globalization, dislocation, economic scarcity, persecution, and other reasons” (*Book of Resolutions*, 390)
    - “Throughout Scripture the people of God are called to love sojourners in our midst, treating them ‘as if they were one of your citizens’ and loving them as we do ourselves (Leviticus 29:33-34 NRSV. ... As people of God were liberated from slavery by God’s hand. As the people of God were liberated from oppression, they too were charged to be instruments of redemption in the lives of the most vulnerable in their midst – the

sojourner (Exodus 22:21; 23:9; Leviticus 19:34; Deuteronomy 10:19; 16:12; 24:18, 22)" [*Book of Resolutions*, 391].

- "Jesus' presence on earth initiated the Kingdom reality of a new social order based on love, grace, justice, inclusion, mercy, and egalitarianism, which was meant to replace the old order, characterized by nepotism, racism, classism, sexism, and exclusion...The calling of the people of God is to advocate for the creation of a new immigration system that reflects Jesus' beloved community" (*Book of Resolutions*, 391).
- "All nations have the right to secure their borders, but the primary concern for Christians should be the welfare of immigrants" (*Book of Resolutions*, 395).
  - ◆ For additional theological and biblical reflection on immigration, also see pages 390-402 of *The Book of Resolutions*.

➤ **Small-Group Reflection**

- Break back into smaller groups.
  - Allow each person to take turns in reflecting on the passages that have been read in the same format as before.
  - Allow participants to identify other theological principles that inform their beliefs regarding immigration and border security.

❖ **Large-Group Reflective Exercise**

- Before ending, allow any participant who would like to answer in one sentence,
  - "One thing that I will take with me from this conversation is..."
  - In light of what we have heard, how can we (as a congregation and as individuals) rely on God's grace to "**accept** the freedom and power God gives [us] to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?"
  - In light of what we have heard about justice, in what ways do we believe God might be calling us to help others "**accept** the freedom and power God gives [us] to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?"

❖ **Closing Prayer**

## Lenten Courageous Conversations – Immigration (Week 3)

Baptismal Questions: Do you **confess** Jesus Christ as your Savior,  
put your whole trust in his grace  
and promise to serve him as your Lord,  
in union with the church which Christ has opened  
to people of all ages, nations, and races?  
By the grace given you, will you remain faithful members of  
Christ's holy church, and serve as Christ's representatives  
in the world?

### Estimated Timeline

The following is based on a 45- to 60-minute timeframe. Adjust as needed.

Opening Prayer (3 minutes)

Overview (5 minutes)

Setting Aside Baggage (10 minutes - notice a little longer than usual)

The Spiral (25 minutes)

Large-Group Reflective Exercise (5 minutes)

Closing Prayer (2 minutes)

### Lenten Courageous Conversation

#### ❖ Opening Prayer

#### ❖ Overview

- Give an overview of the main topic of discussion: The role of the church in ministering with immigrants (documented and undocumented). Have the group recite the baptismal vow emphasis for this week. Point out and read the conversation guidelines.

#### ❖ Setting Aside Baggage

- Form people into small groups, with a maximum of three people to a group. Allow each participant no more than two minutes to finish the following sentences:
  - One thing I learned or that has stuck with me from last week's session is...  
Or for those who were absent last week
  - One thing I hope to learn in this week's session is...

- I would seek to migrate to another country if...
- In the country I would migrate to, I hope I would be received...

### ❖ The Spiral

- Have six participants each read one of the following statistics regarding immigration:
  - From the Department of Homeland Security: "In 2015, a total of 730,259 persons naturalized. The leading countries of birth of new citizens were Mexico (105,958), India (42,213), the Philippines (40,815), and the People's Republic of China (31,241). The largest number of persons naturalizing lived in California (155,979), New York (90,368), and Florida (81,960)."<sup>2</sup>
  - According to [Migration Policy Institute](#): "Since 1970, the number of U.S. immigrants more than quadrupled, rising from 9.6 million in 1970 to 42.4 million in 2014."
  - According to [Migration Policy Institute](#): "In 2014, approximately 53 percent of immigrants in the United States had private health insurance (compared to 68 percent of the native born) and 27 percent had public health insurance coverage (compared to 34 percent of the native born). Slightly more than one-quarter (27 percent) were uninsured, compared to 9 percent of the native born."
  - According to [Migration Policy Institute](#): "Of the more than 1 million new [Lawful Permanent Residents] in 2014, 41 percent were immediate relatives of U.S. citizens, 23 percent entered through a family-sponsored preference, and 15 percent via an employment-based preference. Another 13 percent adjusted from refugee or asylee status, and 5 percent were diversity-lottery winners."
  - According to [Migration Policy Institute](#): "According to DOS Worldwide Refugee Admissions Processing System (WRAPS) data, 69,933 refugees were admitted to the United States in FY 2015... Burma (also known as Myanmar), Iraq, and Somalia were the primary countries of nationality, accounting for 57 percent (39,920) of all refugees admitted in 2015. Rounding out the top ten origin countries for resettlement in 2015 were the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Bhutan, Iran, Syria, Eritrea, Sudan, and Cuba. Together, nationals of these ten countries totaled 90 percent (63,063) of all refugee arrivals in 2015."
  - [According to Migration Policy Institute](#): "There were 679,996 apprehensions in 2014 by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and U.S. Immigration

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Naturalizations\\_2015.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Naturalizations_2015.pdf)

and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the two agencies within DHS responsible for the identification and removal of inadmissible noncitizens...The leading countries of nationality of those apprehended in 2014 were Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador. Nationals from these four countries composed 93 percent of all apprehensions.”

- Read the following from *The Book of Resolutions*
  - “The United Methodist Church understands that at the center of Christian faithfulness to Scripture is the call we have been given to love and welcome the sojourner. We call upon United Methodist churches to welcome newly arriving migrants in their communities, to love them as we do ourselves, to treat them as one of our native-born, to see in them the presence of the incarnated Jesus, and to show hospitality to the migrants in our midst, believing that through their presence we are receiving the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”<sup>3</sup>
  
- Large-Group Reflection using The Spiral Method
  - This style of group dialogue allows participants to voice their perspectives freely. If needed, ask speakers to use a microphone so that all can hear.
  - In the room, place approximately six chairs in a circle. Include a cross or some other symbol to serve as a talking stick within the circle. It is a good idea to include other symbols as well (candles, altar, etc.). Allow participants to sit anywhere **except** within the circle. After a time of prayer or silence, invite whoever would like to enter the circle to do so. Once the circle is full [it is fully acceptable if this takes some time], one of the participants may use the talking stick to speak. Be sure to designate a time limit. Once the individual has completed speaking, he or she passes the talking stick to the person on the left. Individuals may return to their seats after the person on the left has completed speaking. Once people leave their seats, the seats within the circle are open for someone else to take. Thus, people spiral in and out of the circle.

❖ Large-Group Reflective Exercise

- Before ending, allow any participant who would like to answer in one sentence,
  - “One thing that I will take with me from this conversation is...”

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<sup>3</sup> *The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church*, 2012 (Copyright © 2012. The United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission), 393.

- In light of what we have heard, how can we (as a congregation and as individuals) rely on God's grace to "**confess** Jesus Christ as [our] Savior, put [our] whole trust in his grace and promise to serve him as [our] Lord, in union with the church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races, and remain faithful members of Christ's holy church, and serve as Christ's representatives in the world?"
- In light of what we have heard about immigration and immigrants, in what ways do we believe God might be calling us to help others "**confess** Jesus Christ as [their] Savior, put [their] whole trust in his grace and promise to serve him as [their] Lord, in union with the church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races, and remain faithful members of Christ's holy church, and serve as Christ's representatives in the world?"

❖ Closing Prayer

## Lenten Courageous Conversations – Immigrants (Week 4)

Baptismal Questions: Will you **nurture** *these children (persons)* in Christ's holy church, that by your teaching and example they may be guided to accept God's grace for themselves, to profess their faith openly, and to lead a Christian life?  
Will you nurture one another in the Christian faith and life, and include these persons now before you in your care?

### Estimated Timeline

The following is based on a 45- to 60-minute timeframe. Adjust as needed.

Opening Prayer (3 minutes)

Overview (5 minutes)

Setting Aside Baggage (5 minutes)

Small Group (30 minutes)

Large-Group Reflective Exercise (5 minutes)

Closing Prayer (2 minutes)

### Lenten Courageous Conversation

#### ❖ Opening Prayer

#### ❖ Overview

- Give an overview of the main topic of discussion: The role of the church in ministering with immigrants. Beforehand, research statistics about the local immigrant population in the community. Have the group recite the baptismal vow emphasis for this week. Point out and read the conversation guidelines.

#### ❖ Setting Aside Baggage

- Form people into small groups, with a maximum of three people to a group. Allow each participant no more than two minutes to finish the following sentence:
  - One thing I learned or that has stuck with me from last week's session is...
  - OR One thing I hope to learn from this week's session is...

#### ❖ Small-Group Time

- This style of group dialogue emphasizes clarity of thought and naming assumptions or perceptions about the topic. The focus here is on attentive listening, not debating or persuading.
- Present the findings of research regarding the local immigrant population.
- If participants are willing, randomly assign them to a table with no more than six to eight people per table. Identify the cross on the table or other object to be used as a talking stick. Clarify that only the person with the talking stick may speak, and the other group members are to practice attentive listening. Taking each question in turn, allow each participant up to but no more than five minutes to reflect on the following questions. Print out and/or display the questions.
  - What concerns or fears have you heard others express regarding immigrants and immigration policies?
  - Who are the immigrants in our community? (What places do they come from? Where in our community do they live?)
  - What role does the church have in welcoming and “nurturing” the baptized (and yet-to-be baptized) immigrants in our community?
  - Where do you see God leading the church regarding immigration policies?

#### ❖ Large-Group Reflective Exercise

- Before ending, allow any participant who would like to answer in one sentence,
  - “One thing that I will take with me from this conversation is...”
  - In light of what we have heard, how can we (as a congregation and as individuals) rely on God’s grace to “**nurture** *these children (persons)* in Christ’s holy church, that by your teaching and example they may be guided to accept God’s grace for themselves, to profess their faith openly, and to lead a Christian life, and nurture one another in the Christian faith and life, and include these persons now before you in your care?”
  - In light of what we have heard about justice, in what ways do we believe God might be calling us to “**nurture** *these children (persons)* in Christ’s holy church, that by your teaching and example they may be guided to accept God’s grace for themselves, to profess their faith openly, and to lead a Christian life, and nurture one another in the Christian faith and life, and include these persons now before you in your care?”

#### ❖ Closing Prayer

## Lenten Courageous Conversations – Immigrants (Week 5)

Baptismal Question: Do you **believe** in God the Father?

Do you **believe** in Jesus Christ?

Do you **believe** in the Holy Spirit?

### Estimated Timeline

The following is based on a 45- to 60-minute timeframe. Adjust as needed.

Opening Prayer (3 minutes)

Overview (5 minutes)

Setting Aside Baggage (5 minutes)

Small Group (25 minutes)

Large-Group Reflective Exercise (10 minutes)

Closing Prayer (2 minutes)

### Lenten Courageous Conversation

#### ❖ Opening Prayer

#### ❖ Overview

- Give an overview of the main topic of discussion: The role of the church in advocacy. Have the group recite the baptismal vow emphasis for this week. Point out and read the conversation guidelines.

#### ❖ Setting Aside Baggage

- Form people into small groups, with a maximum of three people to a group. Allow each participant no more than two minutes to finish the following sentence:
  - One thing I learned or that has stuck with me from last week's session is...
  - One thing that has had an impact on me this Lenten season is...

#### ❖ Small-Group Time

- Read in part or whole Resolution #3283 from the *2012 Book of Resolutions*:  
"Whereas, family unity is a significant issue of faith. In Scripture it is the family that is created by God to provide the economic and practical necessities, the religious instruction, the emotional stability and care, and the primary means of socialization for the individual. Policies, which devalue families, ultimately devalue individuals and entire societies. The US immigration system must continue to preserve and maintain families...Whereas, family unity is vital to our

society and the foundation for effective integration...Whereas, US citizens should not be barred from being united with their family members...General Conference is in support of just and fair immigration policies that benefit and allow the family to preserve and maintain its unity."<sup>4</sup>

- If participants are willing, randomly assign them to a table. Identify the cross on the table or other object to be used as a talking stick. Clarify that only the person with the talking stick may speak, and the other group members are to practice attentive listening. Knowing your context, pick two of the first three sets of questions. Use half of the small-group time discussing those questions and half of the time to address the second set of questions. Allow each participant up to but no more than five minutes to reflect on the following questions. Print out and/or display the questions.
  - What fears or concerns do you continue to have regarding immigration?
  - What questions remain regarding immigrants and immigration?
  - Where do you continue to struggle with the church's stance on immigration and your own understanding?
  - How does your understanding of the three persons of our one God influence your beliefs regarding immigration and immigration policy?
  - How does being a baptized Christian, part of the church universal (seeing all Christians regardless of nationality as our brothers or sisters), affect your beliefs regarding immigrants and immigration policy?

#### ❖ Large-Group Reflective Exercise

- Before ending, allow any participant who would like to answer in one sentence,
  - "This focus on immigrants and immigration has affected my Lenten season by..."
  - In light of what we have heard during Lent, how can we (as a congregation and as individuals) rely on God's grace to "**believe** in God the Father? Do you **believe** in Jesus Christ? Do you **believe** in the Holy Spirit?"
  - In light of what we have heard during Lent, in what ways do we believe God might be calling us to help others "**believe** in God the Father? Do you **believe** in Jesus Christ? Do you **believe** in the Holy Spirit?"

#### ❖ Closing Prayer

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<sup>4</sup> *The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church, 2012* (Copyright © 2012. The United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission), 400.