

FAITH & IMMIGRATION

The Religious Calling to Welcome the Stranger

CHRISTIAN TESTAMENT TEXTS



“Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod.”

(Matthew 2:13-15)

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph became asylum seekers in Egypt. Without travel documents, they crossed the border, looking for safety and sanctuary. Although they were strangers, someone took them in. Someone welcomed them and protected them. Jesus and his family fled political and religious persecution. These are both present-day grounds for asylum and refugee status.²

ADDITIONAL TEXTS:

Matthew 25:31-46

Romans 12:9-21

Hebrews 13:1-3

HEBREW BIBLE TEXTS

“When an immigrant resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the immigrant.¹ The immigrant who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the immigrant as yourself, for you were immigrants in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.”

(Leviticus 19:33-34)

In both ancient and modern societies, immigrants have often been marginalized. Ancient Israel’s legal framework included many provisions that protected the well-being and livelihood of immigrants.

ADDITIONAL TEXTS:

Exodus 22:21-23, 23:9; Deuteronomy 24:14-22; Ezekiel 22:7, 29

Many stories in the Bible are stories of migration – across distant lands, languages and cultures – including:

Abraham (Genesis 12)

Joseph (Genesis 37)

Moses (Exodus 2)

Ruth (Ruth 1)

Esther (Esther 1)

Ezra (Ezra 7)



*“These examples from Scripture give a human face to immigrants. They are tested and discriminated against; they want to have a home and provide for their families; they worship God; they work at different jobs, some not by their own choice; others are gifted in special ways, rise to positions of authority, and do marvelous things for the country in which they live; some long to return to their homeland while others choose to stay in their new country; and they wrestle with how to coordinate their backgrounds with the different culture that surrounds them – the issues of language, customs, faith, politics, economics and laws.”³ Daniel Carroll R., *Christians at the Border**

While society debates immigration policy, people of faith stand in religious traditions that call us to love our neighbors and to offer hospitality to those in need.

DENOMINATIONAL STATEMENTS

Many religious groups across the theological and denominational spectrum have recently issued statements to address the moral implications of immigration policy in the U.S.⁴

UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

*The human dignity and human rights of undocumented migrants should be respected... Often they are subject to punitive laws and harsh treatment from enforcement officers from both receiving and transit countries. Government policies that respect the basic human rights of the undocumented are necessary.*⁵

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

*The Bible is full of stories of sojourners, strangers without homes, whom God called people to protect... God did not let the Israelites forget that they had been without a homeland for such a long time; the ethic of welcoming the sojourner was woven into the very fabric of the Israelite confederacy. It was more than an ethic, it was a command of God... Jesus embodied the love of God to the world and modeled how we are to act with love and compassion for the sojourner.*⁶

NORTH CAROLINA COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

*As people of faith and conscience, we recognize that while the issue of immigration is complex, our calling is to welcome the stranger and offer hospitality and justice to the migrant and refugee, regardless of legal status... Religious communities must look to our scripture and faith traditions which call us to welcome the stranger, promote hospitality, and seek justice.*⁷

The *NC Religious Coalition for Justice for Immigrants* is a growing interfaith movement of people across N.C. who are committed to welcoming immigrants. To learn more and to sign a statement of support, please visit:

www.welcometheimmigrant.org



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¹This Hebrew word can be translated in several ways, including: "stranger," "sojourner," "resident alien," and "alien."

²Rev. Joan M. Maruskin, "The Bible as Ultimate Immigration Handbook," available at www.churchworldservice.org/PDFs/refugees/Biblehandbook.pdf.

³M. Daniel Carroll R., *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible* (Grand Rapids : Baker Academic, 2008), 86.

⁴For the full text of these statements, visit: www.welcometheimmigrant.org/denominational-statements/.

⁵U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope," <http://www.usccb.org/mrs/stranger.shtml>.

⁶United Methodist Church, "Immigrants and Refugees: To Love the Sojourner," <http://gbgm-umc.org/mission/resolutions/3-biblic.html>.

⁷North Carolina Council of Churches, "Support for Comprehensive Immigration Reform," www.nccouncilofchurches.org/resources/policystatements/support_of_immigration_reform.htm.

Scripture and candle images retrieved from <http://www.textually.org/tv/archives/images/set3/bible-1.jpg> and http://fairimmigration.files.wordpress.com/2008/09/candle_11.jpg

