

Community Dialogue: Immigrants and Immigration Laws

A Role Play

One-hour Session

Focus

This role-play casts the parable of the vineyard in contemporary terms to help participants explore the implications of globalization related to immigration. If you have a two-hour time block, also use "Laborers in the Vineyard Bible Study", or use it as a separate one-hour session.

Goals

- To better understand the complexities of issues and relationships in communities experiencing growth in immigrant population.
- To reflect on the perspectives of different groups within the community with an opportunity for honest sharing.
- To consider different strategies for working together as a community.
- To consider options for faithful responses.

Materials and Supplies

- Slips of paper with group names (see Preparation)
- Newsprint and markers, chalk board and chalk or white board and dry erase markers
- Copies of "Small-Town Rural USA"
- Chairs or tables and chairs arranged in five groups
- Hymnals

Preparation

- Make copies of "Small-Town Rural USA" for each participant.
- Arrange chairs or tables in the room so that participants can be divided into five groups representing the five dialogue groups. Prepare slips with the names of the five groups, enough so each participant can be assigned to one of the five groups. If possible have newsprint, chalk board or white board available to record group reports and proposals.

- Identify someone to act as the recorder for the small group discussion. If possible, this should be a second facilitator or leader so that participants can involve themselves completely in the role play.

Opening Activity

As participants enter give each person an identity slip and ask them to sit with others of their identity group. Say that this session is a role play in which they will assume parts in a community dialogue.

1. Introduction to the Role Play (5 minutes)

Welcome participants to the community meeting. Say that United Methodist Women are concerned about changes that are occurring in the community, and that we believe that the only way to begin to work on our problems is to come together and discuss them. All of us have a stake in the future of this community.

Point out that the groups represent five different categories of people who live and work in our community:

1. Long-time residents
2. Long-time residents who are minimum wage workers
3. Managers of the chicken processing factory
4. United Methodist Women volunteering with Justice for Our Neighbors
5. Immigrant workers

Say that before beginning our general discussion, participants will have some preliminary discussion in these groups. Ask them to begin by reading together the background information on the community.

Learning Activities

2. Small Group Discussion (10 minutes)

SAY:

The first task for the group is to discuss feelings and attitudes about the present situation in our community. It will be helpful if you can identify the race and ethnicity of members of your group. We will have ten minutes for these discussions and then we will come back together to hear from each group.

3. Reporting Back: Sharing Our Perspectives (10 minutes)

Ask the recorder to take brief notes so everyone can keep track of what has been said. Each group will have two minutes to share their feelings and concerns.

Beginning with the long-time residents, invite each of the five groups to report in order without comment from the others. Provide an opportunity for persons to ask brief questions of clarification.

4 Small Group Discussion (10 minutes)

After all groups have reported, **SAY:**

I hope this helps us to have a better understanding of each other and how each of our groups defines the situation. In light of what we have just heard, please go back into your groups and try to develop a proposal for some solutions. The proposals may be addressed to particular groups or they might be proposals for all to consider. Remember to keep in mind your original attitudes and concerns while seeking ways to work together. These are problems that cannot be solved easily.

Allow ten more minutes for discussion.

5. Sharing Our Proposals (15 minutes)

Call the small groups together to hear group proposals. Let the discussion flow freely. Encourage groups to enter into the discussion, reacting to other proposals, presenting their own and making compromises and counter proposals. After fifteen minutes bring the discussion to a close. It is not necessary to come to a final resolution of the issues. It may be helpful to again record the suggestions on newsprint or a blackboard.

6. Wrap Up (5 minutes)

Invite the group to list things that they have learned from this role play or some ideas that it gives about how we ought to proceed as United Methodist Women. Record these suggestions and ideas for later action.

Closing Worship

7. Sing and Pray (5 minutes)

Close with a hymn of your own choosing and a time of prayer.

Small Town Rural USA

Small Town USA is a rural community in the central Midwest with less than 25,000 residents. The community has recently seen a migration of individuals and families from Mexico and Central America into the community. The immigrants have come to work at the new chicken processing plant, one of several in the state that have recently been opened by a national food corporation. Some of these migrants are documented and others are undocumented. Most of the workers at the plant are paid the minimum wage and many of the workers are women. The new workers are competing for jobs with others who are long-term residents of the area (both white and African American) and have worked for minimum wages in truck farming and other jobs in a shrinking agricultural sector. Many younger residents have been discouraged by the poor job market and have left the community in search of better job opportunities elsewhere. The long-time residents and the new immigrant residents do not have many places for interaction, although immigrant children are enrolled in local schools. There are some in the community who have expressed public opposition to the presence of the new residents because of additional costs to the community for the education of immigrant children and the fact that there is little or no housing available for the new residents.

The United Methodist Church has responded. Missionaries have been sent from the United Methodist Church in Mexico to help establish Spanish-speaking congregations. In addition members of the local unit of United Methodist Women have made their church a site for the Justice for Our Neighbors program of the United Methodist Committee on Relief that offers legal counseling services to the new residents. The women provide childcare and hospitality.

UMW has decided to call a public meeting to discuss immigration legislation proposals that are being made at the state and federal level. Some of these proposals would make it a felony to be an undocumented immigrant. Others would make any person or group who assists an undocumented immigrant guilty of smuggling. This would include the churches involved in the Justice for Our Neighbors program.

Participants in the community:

1. Long-time residents of the community
2. Long-time residents who are minimum wage workers
3. Managers of the chicken-processing factory
4. UMW — Justice For Our Neighbors
5. Immigrant workers