

# Immigration: What Can You & Your Church Do?

(assembled by the Immigration Subcommittee,  
Plymouth Congregational UCC Madison WI, June 2017, revised 2/16/2019)

This is by no means an exhaustive list of things congregations can do to help our immigrant and refugee neighbors; this is a list of some things we at Plymouth UCC Madison have learned that we thought might be of help to your congregation. (Feel free to contact us at [lschenk@pcucc.org](mailto:lschenk@pcucc.org) or 608-249-1537 for more information.)

## General

- What does your congregation need? Information? Education? Guidance in how to do effective advocacy? Opportunities to meet immigrants in your community and hear their stories?
  
- Context:
  - What is the history of your community, your congregation, your people in terms of immigration?
  - Are there immigrants/refugees in your community? Who are they? What are their needs?
  - How does the issue of immigration (including refugees) impact your community? Schools? Farms? Restaurants? Hotels/motels? Schools?
  - What other organizations (nonprofits, the school system, social service agencies, other faith communities) are already involved in your community in immigration issues, or are interested in working in this area? (that is, who can we partner with?)
  
- It doesn't matter if your congregation is large or small, urban or rural, rich or poor – there are things that congregations of any size/place/financial resources can do to help their members and their community see that loving our neighbors means all our neighbors. Three areas to explore are information, advocacy, and actions.

## Partners

- It is very important to work with local or regional partners who have expertise in the area of immigration justice or immigrant communities; working with partners speeds up the learning curve, helps you to find experts, and demonstrates that we want to help by providing what people truly need, not just what we think they need. Partner organizations will vary from region to region. In the Madison area, these include:
  - Voces De La Frontera
  - Centro Hispano
  - Open Doors for Refugees
  - Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice

- Local schools, especially social workers
- Local aid organizations (e.g., food pantries, free clinics, legal clinics, etc.)
- Other churches or faith-based aid organizations (e.g., Lutheran Social Services, Jewish Social Services)

### Information

- Educational opportunities (congregational): adult ed, Church School/Sunday School, bible study, discussion groups, mission trips (e.g., Border Links ([ucc.org/volunteer\\_mission-trip-opportunities\\_arizona](http://ucc.org/volunteer_mission-trip-opportunities_arizona) or [www.borderlinks.org](http://www.borderlinks.org)) or Border Issues Fair ([https://www.commongroundonthehill.org/cgotb\\_home.html](https://www.commongroundonthehill.org/cgotb_home.html))).
- Educational opportunities (community): public forums, meet & greet, meals, craft fairs
- Set up an informational bulletin board/kiosk in your church: news and stories about immigrants/refugees; how to contact legislators, governor, president; how to get involved
- Assemble a library or reading/video list
- Put together an FAQ on immigration facts and immigration justice issues for congregation and community
- Meet with local immigrants to hear their stories and find out what their needs are (work with partner organizations and host, for example, a panel discussion or a get-to-know-you meal)

### Advocacy

- Letters/emails/visits to legislators
- Letters to editor/op eds
- Newspaper articles
- Sponsor an advocacy workshop: for congregation but also open to other churches and community to learn how do to effective advocacy (in Madison area, Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice has a good program on this)
- Provide information to the congregation on the latest: news, proposed legislation, when votes are coming up, rallies, community organizations, WI legislative site

## Actions

- Declare your congregation to be an Immigrant welcoming congregation
- Be a sanctuary church or participate in a sanctuary network
- Book reads (e.g., *Enrique's Journey*)/movie nights (e.g., *Fire at Sea*)
- Host a community informational forum
- Host an advocacy workshop
- Connect with and work with community organizations/other churches/schools; provide space for community organizations to use for events/ESL classes/support groups, etc.
- Participate in a denominational task force or committee working on immigration justice (e.g., Wisconsin Conference UCC's Immigration Working Group)
- Participate in Open Doors for Refugees (community organization in the Madison area; third Wednesday of the month; place varies; e-newsletter)
- Participate in a rally
- Money (e.g., community organizations, schools, refugee camps (through Mercy Corps and other NGOs, special aid for local immigrants/refugees))
- People: rapid response teams, community organizations
- Pray for refugees, immigrants; preach about the issue
- Host a prayer vigil

## Resources:

- WCUCC: [www.wcucc.org](http://www.wcucc.org) (see Resource page); Immigration Working Group
- UCC Justice and Witness Ministries: [ucc.org/justice](http://ucc.org/justice); email newsletter; sign up for KYP (Keeping You Posted) e-newsletter
- Wisconsin Council of Churches: [www.wichurches.org](http://www.wichurches.org)

- WI Faith Voices for Justice: [wisconsinfaithvoicesforjustice.weebly.com](http://wisconsinfaithvoicesforjustice.weebly.com) (also sign up for their email newsletter/e-blasts)
- Voces de la Frontera (advocacy): [vdlf.org](http://vdlf.org)
- Centro Hispano (social services): [micentro.org](http://micentro.org) (Madison & Milwaukee)
- Interfaith Coalition for Worker Justice: [workerjustice.org](http://workerjustice.org)
- Open Doors for Refugees: [opendoorsforrefugees.org](http://opendoorsforrefugees.org) (Madison area)
- WI Legislature: [legis.wisconsin.gov](http://legis.wisconsin.gov)
- National lawmakers: [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov), [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov), [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov)

Also: related children's books (for children's messages, or for use in Christian Ed classes, or for adults too) include:

- *Four Feet, Two Sandals* (by Karen Lynn Williams), about children in a refugee camp
- *My Beautiful Birds* (by Suzanne Del Rizzo), a young Syrian boy has to leave his war-torn country to live in a refugee camp, and wonders what happens to the birds of his home city
- *La Frontera: El viaje con papa – My Journey with Papa* (Deborah Mills, Alfredo Alva, Claudia Navarro), a boy and his father cross the US southern border illegally, but get amnesty in 1980's.