

IMMIGRATION IN THE BIBLE

2012 Spiritual Growth Study: An Overview

This study shares the story of the Bible as a narrative of immigrants and migration. Exploring the Biblical and theological understandings of immigration, immigrants, and migration, this study seeks to enable the participants to examine what it is to be a sojourner and to live into the Biblical mandate of hospitality for “the stranger” and “aliens” in our midst.

The study seeks to equip the participants to see the Bible as the ultimate immigration handbook in responding to the immigrants. The Bible was written *by, for, and about* migrants, immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. It gives directions for responding to sisters and brothers, from around the world, who come to a land seeking safety, sanctuary, and sustenance. It is also the book that many of our ancestors used to help them survive the stress and strain of integrating into a new country. The Bible offers guidance and direction for persons who migrate or immigrate by choice; and for persons who flee because of devastation and destruction through violence or natural disasters.

The Bible is the inspired word of the migrant God, the refugee Christ, and the Holy Spirit, who accompany us and every migrant, immigrant, refugee, and asylum seeker, Scriptures provide the basis for practicing a theology of radical, inclusive hospitality. The study relates key insights from the Biblical texts to the story of immigration in the US as well as global migration today and examines key theological themes of migration/immigration, such as journey, vulnerability, liberation, and hospitality; understood through select Biblical narratives such as the story of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar (Genesis chapters 12-16), the story of Joseph and the migration of Joseph's father Jacob and his family to Egypt (Genesis 37-47), the story of the Exodus (Exodus 3:1-12; 13:17-22), the story of women and migration (Ruth chapters 1-2), the biblical call to hospitality regarding the "stranger" and "alien" in our midst (Deuteronomy 6:10-12 & Hebrews 13: 2), the story of Queen Esther, Jesus as an undocumented person in Egypt (Matthew chapter 2), and the faith community's call linked to being pilgrims and sojourners on earth (Hebrews 11: 14).

The study engages the participants in the on-going ministries of the United Methodist Women and the United Methodist Church, and encourages development of emerging ministries with the sojourners of today. Key examples of ministries are lifted up including the service and advocacy work of the United Methodist Women with the immigrants, and Justice for Our Neighbors (JFON) developed by the United Methodist Committee on Refugees (UMCOR).

In the contemporary context of immigration and migration, the study raises once again the question of Luke 10:29, “*Who is my neighbor?*” It interprets Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37) in light of all those who offer themselves as neighbors, even though they themselves may be part of the marginalized community. The writer argues that in helping the unknown man lying dying in the dirt, it is very possible that the Samaritan reached out and touched the Son of God. He responded without regard to race, religion, ethnicity, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. He was, unknowingly living a Christ-like life. Welcoming immigrants provides an opportunity for functioning as modern day Good Samaritans. The study invites the readers to become part of a radical inclusive hospitable community and to enable others to go and do likewise. Following Jesus leads us into lives of service *with and for* others.