MCC US Immigration Listening Project:

WHAT THE CHURCH IS SAYING
When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do (the stranger) wrong. The stranger who sojourns with you shall to be to you as the native among you, and YOU SHALL LOVE THE NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Leviticus 19:33-34
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PROJECT BACKGROUND

The Immigration Listening Project was launched by MCC U.S. in order to assess attitudes about immigration across MCC’s Anabaptist constituency. MCC hopes to build relationships with constituents and churches throughout the course of the project.

Immigration was chosen as a focus for MCC U.S. for a variety of reasons:
• According to a 2006 Profile of Mennonite Church USA, 25% of the denomination’s new members in the past five years are “racial/ethnic.”¹ There are a total of 169 racial/ethnic congregations (18% of the denomination). While exact numbers are not available, we know that a large percentage of these new members are recent immigrants. Plans are underway for the Brethren in Christ church to conduct a Spanish-language profile of its new Spanish-speaking churches.
• Major media has given increased attention to immigration issues.
• Immigration reform is an ongoing legislative agenda in Congress.
• New immigrants are moving to urban and rural areas. These communities have experienced tensions between new immigrants and long-time immigrant communities.

This project sought to listen to perceptions and concerns about new immigrants, and to learn what new immigrants experience as they settle in different communities.

Throughout this report, phrases such as “multigenerational immigrants” and “long-time immigrants” shall refer to those who immigrated to the U.S. before the current generation. “New immigrants” or “recent immigrants” shall refer to those who are recently-arrived first-generation immigrants. Persons in both categories include white people and persons of color.

In order to hear from constituents, MCC staff organized 36 listening sessions across the U.S. Of groups interviewed, 12 were primarily recent immigrant groups, 16 primarily multigenerational immigrants, and 8 were mixed. See appendix i for more information on listening session participants.

Quotes used in this report were pulled from the listening sessions and illuminate repetitive themes. They came from individuals and are not meant to be representative of the views of an entire group or of all respondents.

¹ Kanagy, Conrad. Road Signs for the Journey. A profile of Mennonite Church USA. p. 52. In the profile, the term racial/ethnic is a self-designation by Mennonite Church USA groups with members that include those who are African-American, Latino/Hispanic, Native American, Asian and “other than Anglo.”
The church is paying attention to immigration.

Immigration is both a hot issue and a day-to-day reality for the church. Recurring themes from the listening sessions included:

**Diverse communities**
Nearly all groups have seen immigration diversify their communities in significant ways. Although immigrants come from all over the world to the United States, many participants noted a rise in immigrants from Mexico and Central and South America.

Business owners hire more immigrants. Ethnic food restaurants and many spoken languages are now the norm for many communities, both rural and urban.

**Housing**
Landlords noted that they rent more to immigrants now than they did in the past.

Several mentioned that most new immigrants to their communities tend to move into poorer sections of town and that it is very difficult for immigrants to find housing.

**Schools**
 Constituents with children noted that in some public schools whites are the minority. Many noted that this causes tensions. One said, “Schools are dealing with immigration most heavily—it’s taking a lot of resources, which some people resent.”

**New cultures: blessing or curse?**
New immigrants and some long-time immigrants welcomed more familiar foods and cultures in their neighborhoods. Some persons not born in the U.S. don’t feel as isolated as before. One native Spanish speaker said, “Before, I used to be scared about going to the store and not having anyone understand me, now most of the people working in the stores are Latinos.”

Some long-time immigrants were worried about how much diversity their communities could handle.

Several groups reported tension between established communities and recent immigrant groups. One participant said, “People don’t get along in a mixed community.”

“THE HIGH SCHOOL IS DIVIDED: there is a Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) for Chinese and a PTA for Anglos.”

“30-40% OF MY BUSINESS must be conducted in Spanish.”

“The high school is divided: there is a Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) for Chinese and a PTA for Anglos.”

“Salvadorans, Mexicans, Indians, Palestinians, Guatemalans - they are our neighbors and co-workers.”

“More Hispanics are coming to the community - I see that in rental applications and storefronts changing to Hispanic names.”
NEW IMMIGRANTS ARE FINDING HOPE IN NEW IMMIGRANT CHURCHES. WHITE CHURCHES FROM ESTABLISHED COMMUNITIES LAG BEHIND.

The listening sessions revealed scores of stories telling ways that recent immigrants, through their churches, reached out to other new immigrants.

Most of these churches were churches of color, though some were comprised of white persons from Ukrainian and Russian descent.

Some churches provide job training, others housing, and others financial assistance.

One person of color respondent summed up their church’s position: “We as a community believe that it is our duty to be aware of any families that are recently arrived and provide support to them and let them know that they are not alone. We try our best at being hospitable.”

New immigrants visiting these churches often felt welcomed and loved. One stated, “The church has welcomed us and we belong to the body of Christ. Outside the church there is a lot of racism.” Another said, “The church is the only place I have found fairness.”

Other services that these churches provide included:

- Offering information about passports
- Connecting new immigrants with MCC resources
- Pastoral welcoming for newcomers
- Support groups
- Loans from local funds
- Faith and evangelism ministries
- Food pantries
- Transportation
- Pastoral visits to deportation centers

Immigration work is a lower priority for white established churches

Many white churches said they felt confused about how to help immigrants. Several respondents suggested their churches did not have a close enough connection to an immigrant community to know what needs existed.

Common reasons cited for not connecting with immigrants included:

Language and culture
Several acknowledged that efforts to reach out have been tripped up by lan-
language. One said, “We have invited Hispanic brothers and sisters to share church and found the language barrier too high to know what to do next.”

Another said, “It’s a challenge to enter into (other) cultures due to white privilege and Mennonite culture.”

Some expressed the sentiment that it’s simply awkward to be with people you don’t know well.

Fear
Some long-time immigrants expressed that they are increasingly afraid to help a person without legal documents because they might be breaking a law.

Others expressed the sentiment that it can be scary to approach an unknown person from another culture.

Racism
The listening sessions also revealed outright racism against persons from other cultures. One person said, “If you can’t speak English, you shouldn’t come to the U.S.”

In describing why they liked their new neighbors one person said, “They’re not Hispanic.”

Racism was often noticed by new immigrants. “Some people in the church don’t want us,” one person said.

Complexity
Several groups expressed a desire to build relationships, but confusion over how to begin reaching out. Common reasons for inertia included, “We don’t have any immigrants in our church,” and “We don’t want to get inconvenienced.”

Others said, “It’s not hard to find resources, but it’s hard for the church to come up with an action plan. Implementing the plan is the most difficult of all.”

Others mentioned they would like to build bridges but “we need something compelling to bring us together.”

Initiatives from white churches in established communities

A few white churches have become involved in immigration work, though not nearly to the extent of new immigrant churches. Some examples include:

- Providing ESL classes
- Sending youth to Mexico and other countries to learn root causes for migration
- Playing basketball with immigrant groups
- Inviting Spanish-speaking church for joint worship

“They have opened their doors to us. They have helped by taking my child to school, taking me to clinics, providing food, clothing and a roof.”

(new immigrant)

“I have been in this congregation for five years, and they have helped me so much. They’ve helped me to receive housing and food stamps.

I give thanks to God for allowing me to find the church.”

(new immigrant)

“Without the support of church families who have been here longer, it would be very difficult because our English is very limited.”

(new immigrant)

“Bilingual requirements complicate our processes and issues.”

(white person)
• Engaging in neighborhood outreach
• Providing a food pantry
• Conducting Spanish classes for English speakers
• Hosting community dialogue meetings on immigration issues
• Inviting Spanish-speaking custodial staff to join in church meal
• Addressing housing needs for recent immigrants
• Providing financial help
• Using an orientation curriculum for new immigrants

2007 Immigration Training in Akron, PA. (Left to right) Gloria James, Mirnawati Kurnia Moeljono, Miriam Cardenas, Yvonne Diaz, Claudia Jiménez, Andrew Bodden, Mukarabe Makinto-Inandava, Nelly Moran Ascencio and Wendell Amstutz.
Most believe that economic hardship is a strong motive for immigrants coming to the U.S.

Nearly all groups agreed that low wages and poor living conditions motivated most immigrants to leave their countries of origin.

However, recent immigrants and some long-time immigrants perceived the economic disparities between other countries and the U.S. differently. Many in white established communities described immigrants’ desire to relocate in terms of a wish, while recent immigrants were more likely to describe it as a need.

For instance, some long-time immigrants stated that immigrants are after wealth, “adventure,” and “good weather.” Immigrants, they said, desired an American lifestyle. One person speculated that some come because of family breakdowns at home rather than economic opportunity.

New immigrants were more apt to describe their relocation as an attempt to escape dire poverty and hopelessness. “Hunger doesn’t permit us to stay behind,” said one new immigrant.

New immigrants who were part of the listening sessions gave additional reasons for coming:

- marriage and family
- to send money home
- to flee religious persecution
- to flee conflict, violence, and or natural disaster
- educational opportunities
- political asylum
- professional opportunities
- health care

Some immigrants with specialized skills came with work visas on behalf of corporate sponsors.

“Someone who I know gets paid better as a waiter here than as an electrical engineer back in Mexico.”
(long-time immigrant)

“We are looking for better jobs to feed our families.”
(new immigrant)

“We used to work the land and now there is no market for our food, or we do not produce enough to live off of it.”
(new immigrant)

“If a person could earn $5 an hour in their community, would they risk everything to come to the US and earn $7 an hour?”
(long-time immigrant)

“I have a son who is sick. To buy his medicine and pay for his treatment, we had to sell our house and everything of value that we owned and still it was not enough. I HAD TO LEAVE MY SICK SON AND MY WIFE to come to the US and work with the intention of returning in a couple of years so I can see my son grow up.”
(new immigrant)
The church opposes unjust treatment for immigrants, but is ambivalent about undocumented immigrants.

The most common types of abuse and mistreatment named were:

- Family separations as part of deportation raids
- Unfair treatment and brutality from police
- Discrimination and intimidation at work
- Housing discrimination
- Unfair treatment from neighbors
- Prejudice from other new immigrants
- Systemic lack of access to health care

New immigrant groups were more aware of instances of abuse than long-time immigrants. One long-time immigrant admitted, “It’s really hard to know how recent immigrants are treated except when we get to know them and hear their stories, which isn’t very often.”

The following were factors recent immigrants named in abusive treatment:

**Legal status**

*Undocumented immigrants are the most likely group to receive abuse and mistreatment,* said respondents. They also receive more threats and housing and employment discrimination. Immigrants with legal visas reported that often they were victims of mistreatment simply because others assumed they were undocumented.

**Ability to speak English**

Immigrants with no or limited English-speaking ability are also more likely to be treated unfairly. One person said, “When I speak English, people treat me better.” One’s accent is also a factor, though a British or French accent is viewed more favorably than a Spanish accent.

**Skin color**

Skin color was also cited as cause for mistreatment. “White skinned people are more easily accepted,” said one respondent.

**Religious background**

Many agreed that non-Christians face harsher treatment than Christian immigrants. “So far I mostly see Muslim immigrants getting treated unfairly … like killers,” one person said.
New immigrants’ feelings about abusive treatment

Many recent immigrants reported that they live in constant fear of deportation and discrimination. This impedes their willingness and ability to assimilate by attending schools and public events. It also means they often have no choice but to tolerate abuse. “People don’t want to complain for fear [of deportation].”

Many recent immigrants reported that they are treated better and it is easier to assimilate in communities with high immigrant populations, particularly if those populations are from one’s home country.

Church response: Differing views towards helping undocumented immigrants

Groups differed in how strongly they think the church should advocate on behalf of undocumented immigrants.

Some called on the church to advocate for just treatment regardless of an immigrant’s status. “Love thy neighbor means all your neighbors,” was a common sentiment. Another said, “As Christians we need to work with those in need here at home, even if they are undocumented.”

Recent immigrants also emphasized the need to actively help all immigrants regardless of their legality because of the oneness of Christ: “We help out those who come even if they are not our relatives or even if we’re in a better place than they are because we are Christians and we are all alike.”

Some white long-time immigrants expressed uneasiness at helping out undocumented immigrants. A few participants drew a line at helping immigrants without legal papers.

“They need to be legal,” was a common sentiment.

One long-time immigrant said that for pastoral concerns, he is “happy to relate” to immigrants. When it comes to financial assistance, though, he is conflicted: “What does it mean … to get an MMA [Mennonite Mutual Aid, a health-care institution] grant for someone who is illegal?”

Another said, “I’m okay with immigrants, but I want them to follow the laws and learn English.”

People of color groups, including long-time immigrants such as African-American groups, did not generally use legal status as a condition for giving assistance or relating to immigrants.
Respondents said that their most common source of information about immigration is from television news.

While the most cited source of news about immigrants was the television (Spanish and English), many admitted that they don’t trust mainstream media. One said, “I don’t trust most sources because they are so politicized. Even good web sites tend to present an overly simplistic analysis.”

A lot of information about immigrants was spread through informal conversations and interactions with immigrants at work. One person said, “I hear people talking so much against immigration that I’m speechless.”

A common source of information among recent immigrants was other immigrants.

Others mentioned that they use MCC and Christian Peacemaker Teams publications and the Mennonite press for information. Several mentioned a high level of trust in church media.

A few sought out independent news sources from the Internet.

Several mentioned a desire for more reliable data on the costs versus benefits of working immigrants who pay taxes.

Some expressed that they do not seek any information on immigration because it is an issue they would like to ignore. “The less we hear the less scared we are… If we listen we are always fearing the future.”

Other sources of information included:

- The Bible
- National Public Radio
- Christian radio
- Newspapers
- On-line newspapers
- The Colbert Report
- The Daily Show
- Local organizations (including immigration advocacy organizations)
- Community task forces
- Telephone books (noticing ethnic last names)
- Church pastors
- Immigration lawyers
- Minutemen (an anti-immigrant organization)
One group noted that there is not enough information for undocumented workers on their legal rights, such as how to get compensation for over-time.

Luzdy Stucky (center), former MCC worker, stands with others during a weekly prayer vigil and public witness to “border death in the desert” of the undocumented in Douglas, Arizona.
ATTITUDES TOWARD U.S. LAW ARE SPLIT.

While there was agreement that U.S. immigration law is flawed, there was disagreement on how to fix it.

Several participants wanted to change laws to make it easier and safer to immigrate legally.

Common changes these participants wanted in U.S. immigration law included:
- Simplified structures and speedier processes
- Easier avenues to legalization (especially for those who have been in the U.S. for several years)
- More work visas
- Permission to visit family members in other countries

Many also wanted access to driver’s licenses and insurance for undocumented immigrants.

Some said it should be illegal to deport parents who have children in the U.S.

Others expressed the view that for practical reasons laws must limit immigration.

Following is a list of reasons respondents gave to limit the flow of immigration:
- Fairness to all who want to come to the U.S. “If we allow a fair number of people into the country now, maybe that’s okay,” one person said.
- To allow room for the truly needy. One person said immigration quotas should prioritize “those fleeing from natural disaster, wars and starvation.”
- Limited government resources. Several expressed the view that the U.S. government simply does not have the resources necessary to meet the needs of an unrestrained number of immigrants.

Several in this category favor the construction of a wall between the U.S. and Mexico.

Several wanted legal changes to focus on U.S. trade policies.

Participants in this category said the problem lies more with U.S. economic policies than with immigration laws. If we could boost the economies of the countries from which immigrants come, they said, potential immigrants would stay home.

One person put it this way: “If we can move capital across borders, why not labor? It’s an economic development issue—we should change free trade laws, U.S. subsidies, NAFTA. Changing immigration law is only a band-aid solution.”
Another idea was for the church to set up schools and businesses in developing nations in order to address the root causes of migration.

Other comments about the law

- Some mentioned it is unfair that a path to citizenship is offered to immigrants willing to enlist in the armed forces and go to war.

- One person mentioned that crimes against immigrants should be prosecuted as hate crimes.

- Several participants said they did not know enough about current U.S. immigration law to know if changes are needed. Some were influenced by recent immigration marches. One said, “One thing I know is that many people—mainly the immigrants—are complaining, so there must be things that need to be changed.”

- Some long-time immigrants wanted accountability for employers who hire undocumented immigrants. This was cited as another form of lawbreaking.

Disagreement on reasons laws are broken

Long-time immigrants differed on their perceptions as to why immigrants break U.S. laws.

On the one hand, some conceded “immigrants are forced to lie (against their conscience) just to survive.” “Jacob in the Bible lied and changed his name to go into a foreign land,” another added. In order to find work to buy food and provide housing for their children, immigrants often need to conceal their true identities.

On the other hand, some long-time immigrants saw new immigrants as knowingly deceptive for their own personal gain, at the expense of others. “They come here and lie for their own material gain,” was a common perception.

White people struggle with whether or not to advocate for undocumented immigrants

Many white respondents expressed uneasiness at advocating on behalf of people they say are freeloading and lawbreaking.

“Immigrants need to obey civil laws before the church reaches out to them,” conveys a common sentiment.

One respondent said, “It is difficult to respect their rights and have them take
advantage of our benefits without any requirements. This is a struggle as a Christian.”

One person added, “Sometimes I wonder if I love undocumented immigrants.”

Other long-time immigrants, however, saw it as important to follow God’s law even if that meant breaking a U.S. law.

“Sometimes things compete between doing what is right and following the law,” one said.

Recent immigrants without legal visas admitted a tension between God’s law and U.S. law. For many, however, providing food or needed medicine to loved ones back home trumped the need to follow U.S. laws. One said, “We know we are violating U.S. law, but what about the law of God?”
FAITH STRONGLY MOTIVATES CHURCHES THAT RELATE TO IMMIGRANTS.

For churches relating to new immigrants, immigration advocacy is an expression of faith. Following are Biblical themes that influenced people to reach out.

- Welcoming the stranger
- Treating people how you want to be treated
- Oneness in the Kingdom of God (borders are human inventions)
- Loving one another
- Compassion for refugees (Jesus was a refugee)
- Sacrificial commitment as Christian calling
- Jesus’ example of helping the poor and oppressed
- Paul’s teaching on equality between Jews and Gentiles

For some, to not help immigrants was considered an act of unfaithfulness.

One person said, “A sister from another church told us that their pastors couldn’t help immigrants because the problems of immigrants would become the pastor’s problem. I ask, “Where is your faith?”

Immigration cards like this one, give people access across the US border for short periods of time.
Many new immigrants don’t know how to access services.

While many participants were aware of community agencies offering services to immigrants, many new immigrants said they didn’t know how to access them.

“There are plenty of services, but where are they?” was a common expression.

New immigrants frequently desired more information in their native language about housing options, immigration law changes, medical services, and educational opportunities.

Some new immigrants mentioned they are cautious about “helping” agencies because of negative experiences they’ve had with fraudulent organizations and lawyers that offered help but ended up stealing money.

Participants named examples of services typically provided by community organizations, including:

- English classes
- Translation for medical services
- Free or reduced health care
- Refugee resettlement
- Food and clothes pantries
- Legal aid
- Job placement

Some also mentioned organized opposition to immigrants. Examples included:

- Ku Klux Klan clusters
- The Minutemen
- Skinheads
- Save Our State (SOS)

In addition, recent immigrants named institutions that can be unwelcoming to immigrants. These included:

- Government housing agencies
- Food stamps agencies/welfare agencies
- Hospitals
- Police departments
- Churches
- The Republican Party
Churches working with immigrants want support from denominations and church agencies.

Both new and multigenerational immigrants working on immigration said their work would be augmented by partnerships from outside their local congregations.

Recent immigrant churches mentioned the following specific needs:

- Advocacy from the broader church to influence immigration law changes
- Up-to-date information about immigration law in the form of workshops or pamphlets
- Financial help for new immigrants
- More opportunities for voices of new immigrants to be heard in the church
- Resources to provide psychological counseling for new immigrants
- Resources to offer orientation and welcome to new immigrants
- Affidavits of support
- Translation of documents
- Information about how to access government services
- Resources to help churches address prejudice and racism
- Protection within the church
- Support for immigration marches
- English language and GED training
- Computer classes
- Statements of support from Mennonite Church USA
- Orientation guides churches could use to welcome new immigrants
- Immigration lawyers hired by churches or church agencies

Needs of established white churches in relating to recent immigrants include:

- Tools for theological education on immigration
- Resources on how to connect with sister churches or plan gatherings with a congregation of more recent immigrants
- Speakers in churches who could tell stories and talk about immigration issues
- Orientation guides churches could use to help welcome new immigrants
Findings and Observations

Anabaptist churches of color are leading the way on immigration

What the church is saying about immigration does not differ significantly from the rest of society: the debate from within the church is infused with political philosophies and language from outside the church. The pockets of exception come from within the people of color churches, and some Ukrainian/Russian white churches, that are performing remarkable acts of welcome.

If the broader church and its agencies take “welcoming the stranger” seriously, then the place to start is to listen to and support the demonstrated leadership of new immigrant churches of color.

Churches that welcome immigrants say they are inspired by God’s vision for one humanity rather than by pity or politics. They give much less consideration to U.S. laws they have experienced as unfair than to what they see as God’s desire for right relationships in their communities and just treatment for their families. In some cases, these churches offer decades of practical experience from which other churches could learn.

These churches have moved beyond talking about immigration. They are taking bold, concrete, and organized action to welcome the newcomer in their communities.

Questions to consider:
1. For white groups, how will your congregation or organization listen to and learn directly from churches of color reaching out to immigrants?
2. What steps will you and your family take to build stronger relationships with new immigrants living near you?
3. What are some ways the broader church should advocate on behalf of a new generation of Anabaptist immigrants?

In order to move beyond inaction, white Anabaptists will need to start seeing new immigrants as “us” instead of “them”—and then take risks.

The listening sessions revealed scores of ways in which white respondents viewed many immigrants as community outsiders rather than insiders in God’s one humanity.
To authentically respond to immigration, whites must start by seeing immigrants as “us” instead of “them.” White communities and churches who until now have taken little action on behalf of immigrants, must start viewing newcomers as esteemed members of God’s family—just as deserving of justice and love as church friends and immediate family members.

After that, white churches must embrace risks.

**Throughout history, Anabaptists have taken bold positions at odds with the rest of society. Anabaptists stood up for their core beliefs during the Reformation. They held onto pacifist convictions during World Wars I and II. And there are many more examples. Anabaptists have taken risks in the name of God’s love before, so why not now?**

To be sure, speaking out on immigration will mean facing public scorn. “In God’s kingdom, human boundaries are meaningless,” will not be popular.

Also, to authentically reach out to newcomers, many white people will have to step outside of their comfort zones. To see newcomers as “us” instead of “them” will involve a new way of living. It will involve advocating for immigrant families split by deportation raids as strongly as if that family were a long-time member of one’s church. It will mean using power and status to speak up for the new neighbors that others in the community do not like or value. It some cases, it might mean giving up white power by supporting newcomers running for political office.

**Questions to consider:**
1. What would it mean for you to start caring for and treating community newcomers as you would family or church members?

2. How will you, your church, or your denomination step outside of your comfort zones to treat newcomers as “one of us”?

3. What other risks might be involved in treating newcomers like church or family?

**White churches must work to embrace God’s call to welcome all newcomers—even those who break U.S. laws.**

White Anabaptists enter the immigration discussion with a deep respect for U.S. laws, which have generally treated them well, and with a strong belief in the need to obey those laws. Too often, whites use those convictions to justify ignoring the needs of undocumented immigrants.

Undocumented immigrants in this country daily face more unjust treatment and blatant discrimination, more abuse and violence, than perhaps any other seg-
ment of our population. Though some legal protections exist, many immigrants
do not take advantage of them because they fear being deported. Broader U.S.
society has turned a blind eye to their plight—and has used the law to justify the
neglect. This is a stark example of racism: power in bed with prejudice. *Undocumented immigrants are, in this time and place, “the least of these.”*

God’s clear call is to reach out to such groups.

So by what justification do so many whites in the church ignore undocumented immigrants?

Unfortunately, many white people select Biblical passages and construct theolo-
gies that allow them to remain passive.

For example, one argument is that in Romans 13:1, Paul exhorts his readers to
be subject to governing authorities because “those authorities have been in-
stituted by God.” As such, the argument goes, civil lawbreakers equal divine lawbreakers; undocumented people are more in need of judgment than mercy.

But what about instances where civil law and God’s law contradict? In the case
of immigration, God’s law—to welcome all newcomers—should take prece-
dence but too often does not.

Theologies that justify ignoring the plight of a suffering people, such as im-
migrants without legal status, are at their core both racist and Eurocentric: they
justify placing diverse human communities in hierarchical relationship; they
rarely fail to put white, law-abiding, and English-speaking persons at the top.
This directly contradicts God’s vision for humanity, in which all persons receive
equal justice and are equally loved.

The following observations from the listening sessions further inform this dis-
cussion:

- **Respect for U.S. laws is largely based on whether or not those laws have served a community well.**

White communities who immigrated to the U.S. several generations ago have
generally experienced a legal system that has worked well for them and their
families. As a result, many have placed high trust in the law. The strength of
courtship between today’s white Anabaptists and civil law is perhaps unprece-
dented in Anabaptist history. *This group is the most likely to insist that immigrants follow the law.*

This demand is noticeably softer if not absent when listening to groups,
such as African American churches and recent immigrants, who have not
historically experienced U.S. laws as benefiting them.
Historically, established white communities denied people of color basic human rights and civil protections. Whites used the law to justify treating African Americans, Native Americans, Japanese Americans, Mexican Americans and others as “them” rather than “us,” just as today whites use the law to dehumanize and deny rights to undocumented immigrants.

Today, many new immigrants see U.S. laws as unjust (deportation laws, for instance, allow for families to be split) and as one more impediment to providing food for loved ones.

- **White Anabaptists are willing to advocate against a law if it is in their immediate interests to change it.**

Though U.S. law has generally treated established Anabaptists communities well, there have been exceptions. In these cases, Anabaptists were willing to advocate for legal changes. Following are a few instances:

- During WWI, WWII, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War, Anabaptists advocated for conscientious exemption to military service
- Amish communities in recent decades have advocated for non-photo IDs
- During health care reform debates in the 1990s, Mennonite Mutual Aid lobbied heavily for changes that would benefit non-profit service providers

In addition, MCC itself has a long history of helping white foreign Anabaptists migrate to North America and elsewhere when those communities were faced with discrimination or economic hardship in their home countries. Notable examples include aid given to Mennonites in Russia in their migration from western Russia to Canada, Paraguay, and elsewhere.

**This history of advocacy suggests an opportunity: White Anabaptist communities may be willing to advocate on behalf of immigrants in proportion to their willingness to identify immigrants in their denominations as “us” rather than “them.”**

Of note, a few white churches offer stories—of inward work to dismantle cultural and structural racism, coupled with sometimes controversial actions to welcome newcomers. Their learning could aid the broader church.

**Questions to consider:**

1. Would you, your church, or the broader church be more willing to advocate on behalf of new immigrants fleeing hardship if those immigrants were legal, white English-speaking Mennonite from Europe or Canada? In what ways does racism and legal status affect how you view undocumented newcomers?
2. Imagine political tides in the U.S. turning against peace churches. What kind of welcome would you expect from Mennonites in other countries if you had to flee your homeland and enter another country illegally?

3. How does power and privilege determine why groups flee to other countries illegally? How does power and privilege determine how different groups are welcomed in a country?

**Biblical perspectives influence those who work with immigrants, but many conversations lack Biblical perspective**

The listening sessions revealed that those churches reaching out to immigrants say they are strongly motivated by their spirituality. They often cited Biblical texts that motivated them to relate to newcomers.

Many other attitudes towards immigrants, however, appeared to be more driven by secular political perspectives.

As in the broader culture, there are those in the church who say immigrants are causing a net harm to local communities. They view immigrants as freeloaders who take more in social benefits than they give in taxes. They are angered that many immigrants don’t follow the law to secure visas, driver’s licenses, and insurance. They see a need for more border security and do not want the government to offer more pathways to legal citizenship.

On the other hand, there are those in the church who see the recent influx of immigrants as a net positive. They say that immigrants give more both financially and through their willingness to take jobs others don’t want than they consume in public resources. They empathize with many immigrants’ decisions to sidestep laws that are unfair or unjust. They favor increased attention to human rights at the border and think it should be easier for immigrants to live and work in the U.S. legally.

**That MCC’s constituency is so politically polarized on immigration makes sense in light of findings from 2006 Mennonite and Brethren in Christ church member profiles.** According to the Mennonite profile, 72% of Mennonites identified with one political party or another, compared to 56% in 1972. Of those, 50% identified themselves as Republican, 22% as Democrat. In the Brethren in Christ church, 74% identified themselves as Republican, and 78% voted for Bush in the latest election.

Among the Mennonite Church profile’s conclusions is the warning that “increased political identification of Mennonites threatens to polarize members around controversial issues.” This appears to be happening with immigration.

---

2 Kanagy, p. 11.
3 Burwell, Ronald. Church Member Profile 2006. The Brethren in Christ Church. p. 6-7.
While political involvement is not necessarily bad, discussions in the church about immigration should start with what the Bible has to say about treating newcomers.

Questions to consider:
1. How much is your personal attitude toward immigrants influenced by the Bible versus today’s political climate?

2. Based on what the Bible has to say about immigrants (see next section for passages), what do you think should be the church’s response to newcomers? How should our allegiance to Christ, rather than our government, inform our response to immigrants?

3. What are ways to be both politically active on immigration and biblically based?

In many churches there is a desire to welcome, but cultures and structures of unwelcome

Nearly all groups in the listening sessions expressed a desire to be welcoming. However, in many churches, welcoming the newcomer is conditioned upon certain cultural habits. Specifically, whether or not the newcomer demonstrates

1) allegiance to U.S. law
2) Christian commitment and background,
3) commitment to become culturally Anglo American (especially to learn and speak English)

“I think if they come over, they ought to be like an American,” was a common sentiment.

Another noted, “If you can’t speak English, you shouldn’t come to the U.S.”

Many churches put into place structures that back up these cultural conditions. For instance, churches that provide health care only through formalized institutions have no structure to aid an undocumented newcomer who may not qualify for services. And churches whose members demand immigrants speak English outside of church will find it difficult to shake that conviction when it comes to deciding which language is spoken inside the church. These are examples of institutional racism and are barriers to new immigrants becoming part of predominantly white churches.

In some cases, though, new immigrants worship in predominantly white congregations. Long-time immigrants in these churches tended to be heavily influenced by the experiences of the immigrants worshipping with them. Those who had personal experiences being or worshipping with recent immigrants often reported that those relationships changed their attitudes
about immigrants. One person said, “I can accept immigrants now. We have a couple…in church that is from Puerto Rico.* They’re a nice couple.” Others expressed feeling less fear of another culture after getting to know persons from that culture.

Questions to consider:
1. If you were an immigrant to another country, what kind of church would you look for?
2. What are some ways that your church could be perceived as unwelcoming to new immigrants?
3. What are some ways that your church could actively demonstrate welcome to newcomers?

* Puerto Ricans are US citizens by birth.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scriptures related to foreigners or newcomers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Treatment of foreigners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Exodus: 22:21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Deuteronomy 1:16-17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Deuteronomy 10:19</td>
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<td>• Deuteronomy 27:19</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Jeremiah 22:3</td>
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<td>• Matthew 12:31</td>
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<td>• Matthew 22:39</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Matthew 25:35-40</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Romans 13:8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Galatians 5:14</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Laws</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Exodus 12:49</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Leviticus 24:22</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Numbers 9:14</td>
</tr>
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<td>• Numbers 15:15-16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Deuteronomy 5:14</td>
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<td>3. God’s protection/view of foreigners</td>
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<td>• Deuteronomy 10:17-19</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Deuteronomy 14:19-21, 28-29</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Deuteronomy 24:17-22</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Leviticus 19:33-34</td>
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<td>• Psalm 146:9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I Corinthians 12:12-13</td>
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<td>• Ephesians 2:19</td>
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<td>4. Biblical image of God’s kingdom</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Acts 10:34-35</td>
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<td>• Galatians 3:28</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Ephesians 2:13-14, 19</td>
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<td>• Revelation 7:9</td>
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<td>5. Migrant identity as part of our spiritual heritage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Genesis 23:3-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Leviticus 25:23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I Chronicles 29:15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hebrews 11:8-10, 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Wages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Deuteronomy 24:14-18</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Jeremiah 22:13</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Do not oppress the foreigners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Exodus 22:21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Exodus 23:9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Deuteronomy 24:14</td>
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<td>• Deuteronomy 27:19</td>
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<td>• Jeremiah 7:5-7</td>
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<td>• Zechariah 7:8-10</td>
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<td>• Ezekiel 22:29-30</td>
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<td>• James 5:4</td>
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| 8. Hospitality | • Genesis 18: 1-8  
• Leviticus 19:33-34  
• Matthew 25:35-40  
• Ephesians 2:14-19  
• I Peter 4: 8-9  
• Hebrews 13: 1-2 |
|----------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| 9. Relationship to government | • Exodus 1: 15-22  
• Daniel 3 & 6  
• Esther 4-8  
• Acts 4: 19  
• Acts 5: 29-39  
• Romans 12:20  
• Romans 13:1  
• 1 Timothy 2:1  
• 1 Peter 2: 13-17 |

Miriam Cardenas, MCC staff member, assists a family with immigration and documentation concerns.
**Appendix I - Master List by Regions**

**MCC Central States**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Listeners</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Church affiliation</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Guadalupe Aguilar, Nancy Rivera</td>
<td>Brownsville, TX</td>
<td>MC USA</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Guadalupe Aguilar, Nancy Rivera</td>
<td>Newton, KS</td>
<td>Missionary Church</td>
<td>20 - 30</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Tia Tesfaye Shafo</td>
<td>Denver, CO</td>
<td>MB</td>
<td>5</td>
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**MCC East Coast**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Listeners</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Church affiliation</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Becca Knight</td>
<td>Northern Virginia, DC area</td>
<td>MC USA</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Fred Kauffman, Grant Rissler</td>
<td>West Philadelphia</td>
<td>MC USA</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Grant Rissler</td>
<td>Franconia/Souderton, PA</td>
<td>MC USA</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Grant Rissler</td>
<td>Franconia/Souderton, PA</td>
<td>MC USA</td>
<td>6 high school-ers &amp; 6 retired people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sandra Perez, Grant Rissler</td>
<td>New York City, NY</td>
<td>MC USA</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Becca Knight</td>
<td>Falls Church, VA</td>
<td>MC USA</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Sandra Perez</td>
<td>Bronx, NY</td>
<td>MC USA</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Grant Rissler, Krista Zimmerman</td>
<td>Washington, DC</td>
<td>Various</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Sandra Perez</td>
<td>New York City, NY</td>
<td>MC USA</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Becca Knight</td>
<td>Alexandria, VA</td>
<td>MC USA</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Grant Rissler, Ken Sensenig</td>
<td>White Horse, PA</td>
<td>Amish</td>
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## MCC Great Lakes

<table>
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<th>Number of participants</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Gwen and Les Gustafson-Zook</td>
<td>GL Office, Goshen, IN</td>
<td>MC USA</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Gwen and Les Gustafson-Zook</td>
<td>GL Office, Goshen IN</td>
<td>MC USA</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Gwen and Les Gustafson-Zook</td>
<td>Goshen, IN</td>
<td>People from Mennonite community</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Sandra Vielman</td>
<td>Goshen, IN</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Sandra Vielman</td>
<td>Goshen, IN</td>
<td>Orthodox roots</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Bruce Glick</td>
<td>Kidron, OH</td>
<td>MC USA</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Bruce Glick</td>
<td>Cleveland, OH</td>
<td>MC USA</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Roy Jiménez</td>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
<td>MC USA</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Roy Jiménez</td>
<td>Aurora, IL</td>
<td>MC USA</td>
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## West Coast MCC

<table>
<thead>
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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Jodi Read</td>
<td>Hubbard, OR</td>
<td>MC USA</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Jodi Read</td>
<td>Aurora, OR</td>
<td>MC USA</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Gloria James, Jodi Read</td>
<td>Chino, CA</td>
<td>BIC</td>
<td>14</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Gloria James, Jodi Read</td>
<td>Riverside, CA</td>
<td>BIC</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Gloria James, Jodi Read</td>
<td>La Puente, CA</td>
<td>BIC</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Gloria James, Jodi Read</td>
<td>Riverside, CA</td>
<td>BIC</td>
<td>27</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Gloria James, Jodi Read</td>
<td>Los Angeles, CA</td>
<td>MC USA</td>
<td>No information</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Gloria James, Jodi Read</td>
<td>Pasadena, CA</td>
<td>MC USA</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>Gloria James, Jodi Read</td>
<td>Los Angeles, CA</td>
<td>MC USA</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>Gloria James, Jodi Read</td>
<td>Colton City, CA</td>
<td>No affiliation</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Miriam Cardenas, Jodi Read</td>
<td>Reedley, CA</td>
<td>MCC relationship</td>
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<td>12.</td>
<td>Miriam Cardenas, Jodi Read</td>
<td>Reedley, CA</td>
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<td>13.</td>
<td>Miriam Cardenas, Jodi Read</td>
<td>Reedley, CA</td>
<td>Various</td>
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</table>
# Resources for your Church

## Contact for more Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Contact Information</th>
<th>Contact Person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Mennonite Central Committee  
US, Immigration Education  
Desk | 21 South 12th Street, P.O. Box 500  
Akrôn, PA 17501  
(717) 859-1151  
http://www.mcc.org/us/immigration/  
http://mcc.org/us/ | Rebeca Jiménez Yoder  
Immigration Education Director  
rjy@mcc.org |
| MCC Washington Office  
nccwash@mcc.org | 920 Pennsylvania Ave. SE  
Washington, DC 20003  
(202) 544-6564 ext. 116  
Legislative Associate for  
Domestic Affairs  
kk Zimmerman @mcc.org |
| MCC Central States  
CentralStates@mcc.org | 121 East 30th Street, PO Box 235  
North Newton, KS 67117  
(316) 283 2720  
http://mcc.org/centralstates/ | Karin Kaufman Wall  
Peace & Justice Staff Associate  
kkw@mcc.org |
| MCC Central States’ Southern  
Tier | P.O. Box 4291, Edinburg, Texas 78539-4291  
(956) 383-7995 | Nancy Rivera  
Regional Associate  
nrivera@mcc.org |
| MCC East Coast  
eastcoast@mcc.org | 21 South 12th St., P.O. Box 500  
Akrôn, PA 17501  
(717) 859-1151 ext. 358  
http://mcc.org/eastcoast/ | Grant Rissler  
Peace & Justice Coordinator  
grissler@mcc.org |
| MCC Great Lakes  
GreatLakesOffice@mcc.org | 1013 Division Street  
Goshen, IN 46528  
(574) 534-4133  
http://mcc.org/greatlakes/ | Jorge Vielman  
Regional Associate  
jev@mcc.org |
| West Coast MCC  
wccwestcoast@mcc.org | 1010 G St.  
Reedley, CA 93654  
(559) 638-6911  
http://mcc.org/westcoast/  
Upland, CA  
(909) 946-0809 | Miriam Cardenas  
Immigration & Documentation  
Concerns  
mcardenas@mcc.org |
| | 6044 E. 30th ST.  
Tucson, AZ 85711  
(520) 514-0900 | Gloria James  
Southern California  
Immigration & Documentation Concerns  
852 Alpine St. Suite# 2  
Upland, CA. 91786  
Phone: (909) 946-0809  
gjames@mcc.org |
| | | Jodi Read  
Associate for Migration and  
Peacebuilding  
jread@mcc.org |
### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Resources</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mennonite Central Committee US</td>
<td><a href="http://mcc.org/us/immigration/resources/">http://mcc.org/us/immigration/resources/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mennonite Church USA</td>
<td><a href="http://www.mennoniteusa.org/NewItems/delegates/statement_immigration.pdf">http://www.mennoniteusa.org/NewItems/delegates/statement_immigration.pdf</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Third Way Café</td>
<td><a href="http://www.thirdway.com/btn/Topic=Immigration&amp;Section=Resources">http://www.thirdway.com/btn/Topic=Immigration&amp;Section=Resources</a></td>
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<td>Christian Peacemaker Teams</td>
<td><a href="http://www">http://www</a> cpt.org/arizona/arizona.php</td>
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<tr>
<td>Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy</td>
<td><a href="http://www.iatp.org/iatp/publications.cfm?accountID=258&amp;refID=99390">http://www.iatp.org/iatp/publications.cfm?accountID=258&amp;refID=99390</a></td>
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### IMMIGRATION STATEMENTS

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<td><a href="http://www.mennoniteusa.org/NewItems/pdf/immigration_statement-SP.pdf">http://www.mennoniteusa.org/NewItems/pdf/immigration_statement-SP.pdf</a> - Spanish</td>
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<td>Iglesia Menonite Hispana</td>
<td><a href="http://peace.mennolink.org/articles/immigdecen.html">http://peace.mennolink.org/articles/immigdecen.html</a> - English</td>
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<td><a href="http://peace.mennolink.org/articles/immigdecsop.html">http://peace.mennolink.org/articles/immigdecsop.html</a> - Spanish</td>
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</table>

Rachel Diaz, Esq. talks with Andrew Bodden and Dionicio Acosta, MCC workers.
For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I W A S  A  S T R A N G E R  A N D  Y O U  I N V I T E D  M E  I N .

Matthew 25:35