

Resources for Communities of Ongoing Religious Exploration

V. Unit 7

Immigration

Suggested chalice lighting

With humility and courage born of our history, we are called as Unitarian Universalists to build the Beloved Community where all souls are welcome as blessings, and the human family lives whole and reconciled.

With this vision in our hearts and minds, we light our chalice.

~ UUA Leadership Council, 2008

I. Introduction

The UUA has been officially on the record as committed to a more just policy on immigration and treatment of undocumented immigrants since 1963. Originally, it was a call for reform of US policy during a time when great numbers of refugees from Southeast Asia were seeking a safe place to call home. Today,

Given the diversity of UU membership, it is no surprise that there is a wide range of opinions among individuals in our congregations. On one side, some assert that the first principle, in we covenant to affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person, means that we must be open and welcoming to all people, regardless of immigration status; justice demands that all people are seen as equal and treated differently only in response to criminal behavior. On the other side, some hold that the survival of our nation, and the liberties it guarantees to all citizens, requires that we set and enforce restrictions with consistency; if there is to be justice, all those who wish to immigrate must follow a clearly defined legal path.

II. CONNECT: Readings

Even beyond all of these grave issues, as a religious person—as a Unitarian Universalist—it appears to me that the whole concept of a managed immigration policy is based on both an outdated understanding of the world and the willingness to live by our basest fears rather than out of loyalty to our ideals. At the heart of every religious tradition is the fundamental insight that we are called upon to welcome the stranger, to share our prosperity, and to put the well-being of humanity ahead of the sovereignty of nation-states. And the most rational of humanist logic must concede that on our shrinking globe, it makes no sense to build walls against one another, either physically or legally. Such walls never achieve their alleged purposes, and they inevitably create injustice and suffering. The progress of humanity has always been, and will always be, about the tearing down of arbitrary exclusions, and the freedom to seek our personal and collective fulfillment where we believe it can best be found.

Rev. Dr. Kendyl Gibbons

Many undocumented immigrants and their families live in constant fear of deportation. This fear affects their use of educational opportunities and health care services, and their willingness to interact with local police officers. Enlisting local law enforcement

agencies in immigration enforcement violates accepted practices of community policing and erodes trust between police and the communities they serve, sometimes resulting in racial profiling of those who appear to be foreign. Deportation results in destroyed dreams and broken families—partners separated and children taken away from their caregivers or forced to return to a place they do not know. The perceived and constructed threat of those who are different has led some individuals and nations to meet immigrants with fear. Fear has become a social and political force that incorrectly labels people as “illegals,” “criminals,” and “terrorists.”

UUA Statement of Moral Conscience 2013

Border policies must be consistent with humanitarian values and with the need to treat all individuals with respect, while allowing the United States to implement its immigration laws and identify and prevent the entry of persons who commit dangerous crimes. All immigration laws must respect the dignity of all persons, prioritize the cohesiveness of families and communities, recognize the economic contributions of immigrants, and uphold our moral obligations to provide refuge and welcome the stranger.

Interfaith Immigration Coalition “Interfaith Platform on Humane Immigration Reform”

In the case of the recent rapid increase in immigration from Mexico and Central America, most U.S. citizens tend to think we are somehow passive victims. These aliens are pouring over our border and must be stopped. The truth is very different. Our economic policies, which disproportionately benefit the wealthy, are helping to create wrenching economic dislocations in Mexico, Guatemala, and Nicaragua. Many of the people trying to sneak into the United States were pushed out of their homes by U.S. policies. I am not suggesting that our country does not need to control its borders, and I do not pretend to have all the policy answers. I do know this: We cannot pretend that we had nothing to do with the creation of this problem. I also know this: We are all connected. We are in this together.

Rev. Dr. Peter Morales

III. GROW

Questions for consideration and discussion

1. What do I know about the immigration history of my own people? Was my ancestors' arrival a result of captivity? of economic hardship? of violent persecution? an unforced effort to improve circumstances?
2. How does my knowledge of, or my imagination of, my family history influence my attitudes toward the immigration issues of today?
3. To what extent is my personal view of immigration issues arise from my moral or religious principles? To what extent is it formed by my own lived experience?
4. How would it impact my relationship with friends or coworkers if I learned that they were undocumented?
5. Does it matter that the presence of undocumented immigrants is a civil offense,

handled in civil courts, and not criminal? Does the fact that “illegal” immigration is not technically a crime influence my opinions toward involving police in immigration enforcement?

6. In many cities, the voters or governing bodies have designated themselves as a “sanctuary city,” refusing federal government demands to report arrestees who are undocumented. The US Justice department has responded by threatening to withhold all federal funds to those cities, which can have severe impact on funding for local police, indigent medical care, education services and other vital government programs.

Civil rights and liberties often rely on principle that the federal government is sovereign in matters governed by the Constitution, even if states or localities disagree. If the federal government has a legitimate interest in enforcing immigration law, does it also have standing to require local governments to cooperate? Is it a matter of federal government protecting all Americans?

IV. SERVE

Consider what your response would be, if you learned that someone you know and like is facing the possibility of deportation. Consider whether it would be different if it were an acquaintance whom you did not know well, or a friend of a friend.

Consider what might be the responsibility of a religious community, committed to just and compassionate action. What should we be doing, as individuals and as a body, to affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person?

V. Conclusion

It is impossible to form an educated opinion without education. Unfortunately, this format is not appropriate for communicating historical facts, legal details and demographic statistics. Was it even worthwhile to discuss this topic, without a backdrop of facts on which to base conclusions?

Has this been a space in which those who have minority opinions can feel safe to express them? Did it feel honest and authentic within ourselves and among each other, even if it was uncomfortable?

Were you surprised by differences in the group? By similarities? What other feelings did you encounter? What got in the way, and what was missing? If people in the group would like, invite them to share these things, without interrogation or challenge.

Suggested words for extinguishing chalice:

We are one, and love and hope will guide us. Let us, together with all our brothers and sisters, build a new way.