



Liturgical Common Read

Pastoral Reflection and
Community **Discussion Guide**



In 2014, the Evangelical Covenant Church passed an Immigration Resolution, which was “presented to the church with the intent of fostering dialogue, awareness, and feedback around a complex and often politicized issue.” The resolution began by stating:

The Evangelical Covenant Church is one of many evangelical communities across the country who affirms the importance of engaging in this timely dialogue. Instead of reacting to already-polarized debates, the church has the opportunity to speak into and shape this issue as faithful witnesses relying on our biblical foundation and commitment to follow Christ. This resolution invites the Evangelical Covenant Church, a historically immigrant church, to learn about and respond to current immigration issues with compassion and justice so that we may potentially shape the current conversation on immigration for the good of all.

It is in this same spirit, with the same goals, that the Covenant returns to this issue eleven years later. Our nation finds itself in a deeply divided place regarding immigration policies, legislation, and enforcement. Our country is polarized; families and communities are being affected. Immigration may at times feel like a national issue that only impacts the United States, but in reality, it is an issue with global impact. In times like these it is imperative for us as Covenanters to return to the source of life, the Word of God. We find ourselves yet again in a place where instead of reacting to already polarized debates, we are afforded an opportunity to speak into and shape this issue as faithful witnesses relying on our biblical foundation and commitment to following Christ.

Therefore, we are inviting our Evangelical Covenant Church family to prayerfully participate in a Liturgical Common Read of the book *Welcoming the Stranger*—along with this accompanying pastoral resource featuring insights from a wide range of Covenant leaders—as a tangible expression of our unity in Christ and our identity as members of one interconnected body. This book was chosen because it is steeped in Scripture, replete with theological insights, and full of robust stories that help us understand the purposeful narratives of the people involved in this issue. Immigration impacts real people, families, and communities. We must never lose sight of this as children of God.



According to Lifeway Research in 2024, while two-thirds of US evangelicals are aware of what the Bible teaches about how immigrants should be treated, only 26 percent say that the Bible actually shapes their views on immigration. This Liturgical Common Read offers us the opportunity to not only read and study together, but to also reflect on two questions at the heart of our Covenant identity: “Where is it written?” and “How goes your walk?” This occasion to communally discern also affords the Covenant an opportunity to live into

[The Six-Fold Test](#) by practicing solidarity as a denominational family. Together, we will prayerfully discern what Scripture says, what our faith calls us to, and how the Spirit is leading in this crucial moment. We invite you to join us as we come together to pray, listen, learn, and discern together as a Covenant family.



Anna Ross is a member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Ojibwe. She has several years of experience working successfully with urban, rural, and tribal communities throughout North Dakota and Minnesota. She has led and participated in grassroots community work and advised tribal government leaders, directors, and state officials. With a master's degree in Indigenous Nations Studies and 15 years of administrative and supervisory experience, Anna has led several nonprofits, worked in education, and facilitated community trainings. She has also held several positions as a liaison and connector between federal, state, local, and tribal organizations.

Anna currently serves as the engagement and communications director at Turtle Mountain Community College. She and her husband, Roger, returned to her community on the Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation in Belcourt, North Dakota, after a decade in Minnesota, where they started the first Covenant church on an Indian reservation. Together, Roger and Anna have four children. They are also the caregivers for her grandparents, who raised her.

Introduction

ANNA ROSS

Several years ago, I sat in a conference listening to the opening remarks from a young woman from the Wampanoag tribe. What she shared is something I will never forget. She spoke candidly about growing up feeling embarrassed to say she was Wampanoag, the tribe known for having first contact with the “Pilgrims.” That historical association had long carried a weight of shame. But then her voice shifted when she shared that she no longer felt that weight—instead, she felt pride.

Her ancestors were not merely present at the beginning of colonization—they were instrumental to the settlers’ survival. They taught the English how to plant crops, where to fish and hunt, and how to live in harmony with the land. These were the actions, not of a conquered people but of a people rooted in wisdom, hospitality, and strength.

That moment reframed history for me—not to erase its pain, but to recognize the humanity, dignity, and resilience of Indigenous people.

Too often, when we have discussions about topics like immigration and immigration policies, Indigenous voices are absent. Modern immigration policies often mirror the logic of colonization: controlling movement, determining who belongs, and enforcing power over land. From a Native perspective, this is more than ironic—it is a continuation of historical injustice.

It is striking that descendants of settlers who displaced Native peoples now enforce rigid definitions of “legal” and “illegal” entry. These borders are relatively recent, drawn by people whose ancestors colonized Turtle Island, and who themselves have never asked permission to live on or govern this land that Creator entrusted to Native people as co-sustainers, stewards, and image bearers who would live in harmony with the land and all that fills it. From many Indigenous worldviews, newcomers are not inherently outsiders—they are potential relatives.

Among my people, the Ojibwe, we are guided by the Seven Grandfather Teachings: **Wisdom, Love, Respect, Bravery, Honesty, Humility, and Truth.** They don’t offer a political platform, but they do provide a moral compass:

- **Wisdom:** Understand root causes and seek long-term healing.
- **Love:** Offer care without judgment.
- **Respect:** Honor the dignity of every migrant.
- **Bravery:** Speak out against injustice.
- **Honesty:** Acknowledge the colonial roots of our systems.
- **Humility:** Recognize no one owns the land more than another.
- **Truth:** Act with clarity and responsibility.

One quote, author unknown, captures it best:

“The wall-builders live on land built on broken treaties, and the irony is louder than their rage. Honesty means looking in the mirror and seeing not a gatekeeper, but a guest.”



Rev. Dr. Dennis Edwards is dean and vice president of church relations at North Park Theological Seminary after having previously been associate professor of New Testament. Dennis has three decades of urban pastoral ministry experience. He most recently served as senior pastor of the Sanctuary Covenant Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Prior to that, Dennis served in Washington DC and Brooklyn, New York.

Dennis holds a bachelor of science degree in chemical engineering (Cornell University), a master of divinity degree in urban ministry (Trinity Evangelical Divinity School), as well as a master of arts and PhD in biblical studies (Catholic University of America). Dennis enjoys baking, playing his flute and saxophone, as well as weightlifting and cycling—as much as his body will let him. He’s the author of several articles and books including the recent *Humility Illuminated: The Biblical Path Back to Christian Character*.

Dennis has been married to Susan Steele Edwards since 1982. They are the parents of four children and grandparents of five.

Chapter One: *The Immigration Dilemma*

REV. DR. DEAN EDWARDS

“Who is my neighbor?”

That is the question an expert in the Torah asked Jesus in Luke 10:29 in order to support his narrow way of thinking. It is that question that prompts Jesus to offer the parable we call the Good Samaritan. We could say that the question, “Who is my neighbor?” looms large behind the first chapter of *Welcoming the Stranger*. This first chapter invites everyone to consider what it means to be a neighbor, especially as we pay attention to the current US immigration crisis. Part of what it means to be a neighbor is rejecting stereotypes, generalizations, and all rhetoric designed to

offer a one-dimensional characterization of immigrants. Provocative and inflammatory speech prevents us from knowing immigrants and fuels our ignorance of the complex details associated with their presence in the US.

Soerens and Yang remind us that immigrants are our neighbors, are fellow human beings created in the image of God, and are not inherently problems—even though our current structures for managing immigration are far from perfect. We Christians have an opportunity to be good neighbors to whomever we meet regardless of where they were born.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How does our Covenant lineage as mission friends uniquely situate us to faithfully respond in this watershed moment?
- What opportunities has the present immigration crisis created for solidarity, rather than animosity, for Covenant churches?
- If you assert that “my community is monolithic, so we don’t face any immigration issues,” perhaps you could explore if that is truly the case and examine if you are prone to minimizing the current immigration crisis.
- By contrast, if you are quick to point out that “dozens of languages are spoken in our local high school,” you could also explore the number and depth of relationships that you have with immigrant families in your community.



Rev. Juana Nesta is the co-lead pastor of Stockton Covenant Church, a vibrant multicultural congregation in the heart of California's Central Valley. Alongside her husband, Fil Nesta, she has planted two Spanish-speaking Latino churches within the Pacific Southwest Conference of the Evangelical Covenant Church, advancing the mission of reaching and equipping diverse communities with the gospel.

A committed leader in Latino ministry, Juana served as the president of ALIPE (Asociación Latina de la Iglesia del Pacto Evangélico) for six years, where she championed leadership development, advocacy, and pastoral care for Latino pastors across the denomination.

Juana is passionate about empowering leaders, fostering multiethnic ministry, and advocating for justice within both church and society. Her work reflects a deep commitment to spiritual formation, community engagement, and the holistic flourishing of the body of Christ.

Chapter Two:

“Aliens” Among You: Who Are Undocumented Immigrants?

REV. JUANA NESTA

The authors emphasize that the Bible calls Christians to welcome the stranger, not just as a moral choice but as a divine command. Drawing from passages like Leviticus 19:34, “The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born,” and Matthew 25:35, where Jesus identifies with the stranger, “For I was a stranger and you invited me in,” the authors call us to extend radical hospitality to immigrants. This call reflects God’s love and justice, which transcends national boundaries and is central to the Christian faith.

However, in the current political climate we see policies that run counter to these biblical truths. The separation of families at the border, the elimination of asylum rights, and the criminalization of immigrants directly contradict Scripture’s

call to welcome and protect those in need. The rhetoric surrounding immigration has become increasingly hostile, and many immigrants, including those who are lawfully present in the US, face the constant fear of being torn from their families and deported.

What’s happening right now hits differently for someone like me. I am terrified every time my Mexican husband drives or travels. Even though we are US citizens, that no longer seems to matter. The fear that anyone who doesn’t look a certain way could be profiled, detained, or deported is terrifying. The possibility of being sent to places like the Venezuelan concentration camp, CECOT, is a chilling reality.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How do we reconcile the call to hospitality with the current political climate that seems to prioritize division over compassion?
- How can the Church step into this moment, not just as advocates, but as people willing to risk our own comfort to stand alongside those who are vulnerable?

- Soerens and Yang invite us to reflect on the biblical truth that immigrants are our neighbors, made in God's image, and thus deserve to be treated with dignity. This is not just a matter of policy; it is a matter of faith. As we see the immigrant community increasingly vilified, how can we live out God's call to welcome the stranger in such a time as this?



Rev. Tim Hawkinson has served as lead pastor of Renew Covenant Church in Carroll, Iowa, for ten years. A graduate of North Park University and North Park Theological Seminary, Tim has served in pastoral ministry for 22 years, previously serving in his native California and in the Chicagoland area.

Tim and his wife, Jill, have two sons. He is passionate about discipleship, the importance of companionship in diverse community, and local church ministry. He can be found filling his coffee cup, relaxing with his dogs, and convincing himself that skateboarding in middle age is a good idea.

Chapter Three:

Nation of Immigrants:

A Historical Perspective on Immigration to the United States

REV. TIM HAWKINSON

As evident in the chapter, the diversity of the United States is an integral part of its history, identity, and present reality. Simultaneously, two truths hold: the factors that led individuals to settle here are distinct, yet the experience of unfamiliarity is shared by all—the unfamiliarity of a new land, the unfamiliarity of the people they would encounter, and their own unfamiliarity to those who encountered them. But what does it mean to be “unfamiliar”? To not be of one family. In a land composed almost entirely of immigrant people, familiarity must be forged of time, commitment, and a willingness to see oneself in the other.

The story of the Evangelical Covenant Church is inseparably bound to the story of European migration to the United States. From the middle to late 19th century, between one-fifth and one-third of the population of Sweden boarded ships for a new home. Like those described by Soerens and Yang, these Swedes came for a host of reasons: fleeing famine and joblessness, seeking to join family members, and to pursue economic prosperity. This willing step toward unfamiliarity was made deliberately and

not without struggle. In his book, *Into One Body By the Cross* Vol. 1, historian Karl Olsson writes that they were “deeply troubled by the risk and anxiety of change, but also reaching out for their own particular, kind of freedom and dignity, and willing to pay the price to achieve it” (p. 4).

How many of those early Covenanters genuinely desired to leave their homeland? How many felt compelled, for a variety of reasons, to do so? How many came with eager expectation? And how many arrived in desperation?

They were unfamiliar people in a strange new place and the formation of the Covenant tells their story: immigrants yearning to establish themselves while preserving their ethnic and cultural identity and resisting total assimilation into an unknown society, while, as mission-driven followers of Jesus, seeking to bring the new life they had found in Jesus to the strangers they encountered.

This was no simple task. Chapter 3 speaks to the propensity for earlier immigrants to look with skepticism upon the newer arrivals. While we in the Covenant pride

ourselves today on being a multiethnic mosaic of churches, we would be remiss if we failed to recognize that this has not always been the case among all Covenanters. A diversity of sociopolitical opinions has always existed among us. During the civil rights era of the 1960s, for example, many who stood in solidarity with African American communities were at the same time skeptical of our Catholic brothers and sisters.

Will we today, as members of the Covenant, acknowledge our own history of being strangers? Will we recall the gospel's call to remember the foreigner, the orphan, the poor, and the widow? And will we permit the psalmist's lament, a central text in our history, to guide our attitude toward those who currently seem unfamiliar to us?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How can we ensure that Scripture is the foundation for our response to immigration?
- How can our denominational roots as an immigrant, pietistic movement help us to think and live in distinctive ways regarding Scripture's call to welcome the stranger?



Dr. Jeffry Caballero is former executive president of Centro Hispano de Estudios Teológicos Estudios Teológicos (CHET) and president of the board of directors of the Asociación para la Educación Teológica Hispana (AETH). A distinguished leader in Latino theological education and an attorney with a profound ministry background, he has led significant advancements in Latino theological education and held various leadership roles within the Latino community. Of Mexican, Honduran, Salvadoran, and Lebanese descent, he comes from a family of evangelical ministers. He completed his undergraduate education at UCLA, holds a master's degree in legal studies from Trinity International University, a master's degree in religious education from West Coast Baptist College, and a doctorate in law (JD) from the Appalachian School of Law.

Jeffry says, "I'm a lifelong learner who takes classes just for fun—yes, on purpose! Right now, I'm diving deeper into theology at Emory University and loving every minute of it."

Chapter Four:

Immigrating the Legal Way: Our Immigration System Today

DR. JEFFRY CABALLERO

As president of CHET, the Covenant's school of theology for Latino ministries, I serve a community shaped by hope, hardship, resilient faith, and life-changing stories. Our students and alumni carry stories like Elena's a woman who crossed the border decades ago, raised US-citizen children, yet still has no clear path to legal status.

As an immigration attorney, I have walked alongside people who live with dignity, faith, and deep roots in our congregations yet sadly remain undocumented. They are not avoiding the law; rather, the law has closed every door to them. Even parents of US citizens, like Elena, may face a ban from re-entering the US if they dare to leave the country, forcing impossible choices between legality and family. Requesting asylum is

is a long and challenging process with no assurance of it being granted, employment-based immigration is nearly impossible for Latinos to obtain, and family-based immigration is not as easy as it is said to be.

These individuals are not strangers, they are our neighbors, friends, pastors, worship leaders, and fellow Covenanters.

For a Spirit-led, multiethnic body committed to compassion and truth, this is not an abstract policy debate—it is a gospel issue. May we have the wisdom, courage, and discernment to see clearly, speak truthfully, and act justly, shaped by Scripture and grounded in the transformative love of Christ.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How do we as a church community minister to those stuck between remaining in the US and breaking immigration law, and leaving their family behind to return to their country of origin, where they had fewer opportunities?
- How do we reconcile the grey area of immigration when it saves families from pain and further injustice at home?
- How do we not only welcome the stranger (Leviticus 19:34) but comfort, uplift, and support them when the country they are born in determines how difficult it will be to start a new life in US, despite needing it the most?

- How do we make a meaningful difference with our friends, families, communities, and churches by reforming the current immigration procedures?
- What does justice look like when this country's policies create injustice?



Dr. Sophia Magallanes-Tsang is assistant professor of Old Testament at North Park Theological Seminary in Chicago. She describes herself as a relational educator who uses multiple methods of teaching, with a passion for equipping God's people for life and ministry. She says, "I hope that students will know God's love for them and how to value and affirm God's image in every person."

Sophia's current projects are *Comadres: Biblical Interpretation as Scriptural Accompaniment*, *Reading the Word Interculturally*, and a commentary on the Book of Job with fellow Latina and co-author Celeste Gonzalez-Moreno.

Sophia lives in Chicago with her husband, Sam Tsang, and her dog, Honey. She loves to sing with her six sisters when she visits them in Los Angeles, California.

Chapter Five:

Thinking Biblically About Immigration

DR. SOPHIA MAGALLENES-TSANG

Care for the migrant is at the heart of God's law. Caring for them is one way that God's people remember that they also were migrants God cared for throughout their history. From Abraham's sojourn in Canaan to the Exile, God led his people in and out of the promised land, showing them that the earth is truly the Lord's. God granted land to them, not to own but to steward. God commanded them to manage it with the marginalized in mind, the migrant included. Unfortunately, the marginalized were the first to be neglected when the Israelites turned their backs on God.

In the New Testament, Jesus echoes what Yahweh says in Deuteronomy, saying, whatever you do onto the most vulnerable in society you also do onto him. Early Christ-followers emphasized obedience to God's kingdom ethic in caring for the vulnerable since their true citizenship

was in heaven. This diasporic theology culminates in John's vision of a multitude who center themselves around the enthroned Lamb, who is a refuge for all people.

Old and New Testament principles prompt Christians not only to anchor our compassion and just actions towards immigrants, but to root our care for them in God's mercy and justice. Human empathy only goes so far; for this reason, God commands us to be perfect as he is perfect, being gracious both to those who we think are worthy and those who we would think are not. At the core of God's justice is his mercy. The cross epitomizes this.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Had you previously realized how consistently God's people migrated?
- How does God's consistent command to care for the stranger inform our understanding of immigration today?
- How does this chapter shape our response to immigration legislation and policies?



Rev. Frank Riley is the senior pastor at Excelsior Covenant Church in Excelsior, Minnesota. Frank has specialized in church revitalization, helping to revitalize six congregations in California, Connecticut, and Minnesota in addition to planting four congregations. For the past 19 years, he has served as a chaplain in the United States Navy Reserve, which has included two combat deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. Currently, Frank serves as the 4th Marine Air Wing Chaplain overseeing chaplains in the care of some 12,000 Marines.

Chapter Six: *Concerns About Immigration*

REV. FRANK RILEY

The key takeaway in this chapter for me is the reminder that a sizable percentage of recently undocumented immigrants, regardless of why they are undocumented, are our brothers and sisters in Christ. They, like each of us, are citizens of heaven with whom we will rejoice and spend eternity.

As of the writing of the book, 11 million undocumented immigrants were residing in the United States. Since that time, some estimates put that number at approximately 18.6 million, accounting for 5 percent of our entire population. While this rate of immigration is concerning, the growth of our economy has always been reliant on the growth of our population. As birth rates have fallen in the United States, it is possible that this influx may add to our national security rather than detract from it.

God has a way of working beyond the machinations of human endeavors for God's purposes and our good.

Reading the chapter, I found myself wondering where mercy and justice might find balance? It takes only one murder to change the fate of a family, and it takes only one terrorist to change the history of our country. But that undocumented dad working in a needed trade and supporting his US citizen family, it seems to me it would be in the best interest of the nation for him to remain. What about children born in the United States? They are citizens, for those believing the Constitution should be defended. Shouldn't we defend their right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness with their family? On the other hand, for criminal infractions that violate the desired hospitality of a nation, a heightened priority on deportation seems just. It is hard, is it not?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How do we faithfully live within the tension of needing to be vigilant in concern while seeking what is best, right, and good?

- How do we value statistics? What do they illuminate about how many immigrants meaningfully contribute to our nation and follow the law?
- Given these tensions, how do we continue to remember that a sizable percentage of undocumented immigrants are our brothers and sisters in Christ?



Rev. Ancy Post was born in India and raised in the diverse town of Teaneck, New Jersey. She holds a BA and an advanced MA in physical therapy from NYU, as well as an MDiv from Alliance Theological Seminary. Ancy currently serves as pastor of family ministries and student discipleship at Metro Community Church, a multiethnic church in Englewood, New Jersey. She is passionate about seeing children and youth grow in Christ and is deeply committed to justice ministry, serving alongside her church to impact the local community.

Ancy lives in Mahwah, New Jersey, with her husband, Scott, and their daughters. She enjoys quality time with her family—crafting, movie nights, and cheering her daughters on in their various sporting events.

Chapter Seven:

The Value of Immigrants to the United States

REV. ANCY POST

This chapter is a powerful reminder that immigration is not a burden to bear but a blessing to embrace. Economist John Stapleford states, “Immigration is one of the major reasons why the US economy is so robust, diverse, dynamic, and resilient.” Yet, as the authors point out, the central question in our national discourse often becomes: Is immigration beneficial to us?

From a Christian perspective, that’s the wrong question. On page 124, authors remind us: “The scriptural witness is that we are to care for the immigrant stranger living among us, without any caveat that exempts us from this responsibility if it is not in our individual or national economic interest.”

We have seen in our own church the reality of immigrants being exploited low wages, overcrowded housing, and no legal recourse. While immigrants contribute significantly to the economy—through taxes, labor, and job creation, our calling as Christians must go deeper. We are not called to love the stranger because they benefit us. We are called to love the stranger because they bear the image of God.

If our vision is based on scarcity, we will fear that others are taking from us. But Scripture calls us to live with a mindset of abundance, rooted in God’s provision. Emulating God’s character means embracing generosity, hospitality, and justice, not just when it is convenient or profitable, but always.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How might your church embody a spirit of abundance and hospitality toward immigrants in your community—regardless of their economic status or legal standing?
- In what ways have we, perhaps unknowingly, allowed economic interest to determine our posture toward immigrants, rather than the values of Scripture?
- What practices could help us better reflect the image of God in how we welcome, advocate for, and walk alongside immigrants?



Rev. Christopher Hoskins is global personnel with Serve Globally, a mission priority of the Evangelical Covenant Church, on special assignment with the Center for World Christian Studies, a joint educational endeavor between the Covenant and North Park Theological Seminary. As a scholar-practitioner, Chris appreciates the intersection of ministry and reflective, critical theological practice promoted by the Covenant in our congregations to better serve God and neighbor.

An ordained minister, Chris has served congregations in Chicago, Omaha, and Quito as well as in migrant ministries, clergy care, disaster relief, and theological education with Iglesia del Pacto Evangélico del Ecuador (Evangelical Covenant Church of Ecuador). Chris is also a PhD candidate in religion, psychology, and culture at the Graduate Department of Religion, Vanderbilt University. He is working on the last chapter of his dissertation focused on improvised spiritual care practices created by survival migrants from Venezuela traveling to Ecuador. He shares life and ministry with his spouse, Jenny, and their two teenaged children.

Chapter Eight: *Immigration Policies and Politics*

REV. CHRISTOPHER HOSKINS

We have been through two presidential campaign cycles in the United States since the publication of *Welcoming the Stranger*. Canada and Mexico have also held elections in which immigration and borders have played a major role. Once again in the US elections, distorted, inhumane, and hateful narratives have driven political discourse with unfounded accusations of criminality, casting immigration of any sort as somehow deviant and threatening. Policy and procedure, protections and pathways change from one day to the next with little regard for how harm is wrought on families, individuals, and communities.

Do you know people who are acutely impacted by these realities?

For those whose congregations and/or clergy come from the immigrant community or are part of congregations who have partnered with the government to assist in refugee resettlement, we have been left frustrated, confused, hurt, fearful, and paralyzed. “Why is it easy for

evangelicals to love us when we are here [abroad] and hate us when we come [to the US]?” was a question posed to me when I served internationally. That question remains with me:

“What makes those of us from abroad so threatening, so easy to dehumanize?”

Many people migrate because they understand that God is with them as they search for survival and livelihood, much like the stories of our ancestors of faith. The fact that most people migrate after prayerful consideration and discernment is lost in political brokering, which serves to keep policy unwieldy, expensive, dehumanizing, and provisional benefits polarized by partisan politics in the United States. For thirty years, presidents of both parties have been unsuccessful in passing meaningful immigration policy reform. This chapter asks us to consider our public witness in relation to three aspects of comprehensive immigration reform.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What could be a political ethic and vision rooted in our mosaic community, fostered by a God on the move, a God of all nations?
- What forms of reform advocacy—upholding the humanity of all people—is your congregation poised to be involved in?



Rev. Grace Shim is the executive minister of Serve Globally, the global mission arm of the Evangelical Covenant Church. She is an ordained pastor, a licensed clinical professional counselor, and formerly served as the executive director of Cornerstone Counseling in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Grace, her husband, Bob, and family served as Covenant global personnel for 19 years in Kyrgyzstan and Thailand, focusing on mental health and medical care. Her passion is to see God's people pursue and embody wholeness and reconciliation as we engage in communities locally and globally. Grace and Bob have three amazing adult children and one son-in-law. She enjoys travel, exploring new cultures, and having meaningful conversations over a hot cup of coffee.

Chapter Nine:

Immigration and the Church Today

REV. GRACE SHIM

“The immigrant population actually presents the greatest hope for Christian renewal in North America.”

—Timothy Tennent
(Asbury Theological Seminary)

Statistics show that church decline and stagnation are trends happening primarily among white, evangelical adults. Yet the fastest growth is occurring among immigrant congregations and churches who are reaching out to their communities. Whether by choice or forced displacement, immigrants from around the world are bringing Christ-centered faith tested by adversity, infusing life and energy into churches and communities in the countries they now call home.

God is bringing a fresh wind of the Spirit through immigrants and refugees, offering

opportunity for the Church to more fully participate in God’s mosaic family—if we are willing. Our churches are called to “welcome the stranger” through care, relationship, and advocacy, which are for those who are navigating the unfamiliar, alone and uncertain. In doing so, we are enriched in learning from and experiencing the diverse expressions of powerful faith in worship, culture, shared humanity, and connection. For many churches, taking a step of faith in reaching out to immigrants addresses an important need and response to God’s call, but it also creates the opportunity for the church to breathe new life in Christ again.

Do we believe this to be true? May we not let fear, inconvenience, discomfort, or self-interest robs us of the God-given gift of engaging those in our communities who could lead to mutual blessing and transformation with the impact not only in our churches but around the world.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- In what ways do you already see your church engaged in welcoming, supporting, or advocating for immigrants in your community? How can you celebrate and build on this?
- What facts and insights were new to you regarding the relationship between immigrants and church renewal and growth?

- What beliefs or challenges contribute to your church's struggle to welcome and reach out to populations different from your own?
- How has your faith been enriched because of the faith witness of someone culturally different from you?
- What might be ways your discipleship journey could be expanded by those whose faith journeys are both similar to and different from yours? What shifts would need to take place in you or your church to embrace this learning?
- What costs might the church experience in not welcoming immigrants into the church family, serving and supporting where needed, or advocating for policy and systemic change?
- What is one step you, your small group, or your church, can take given the numerous ideas offered in this chapter?



Rev. Cindy M. Wu is the co-founder and director of diaspora ministries at [Mosaic Formation](#), a nonprofit she leads with her husband, David. Mosaic Formation serves leaders in underserved contexts with spiritual formation care and intercultural training. Additionally, Cindy mobilizes Christians to welcome refugees, a true passion of hers. As a “pastor to pastors,” she focuses on serving the city and church at-large in her ministry.

Cindy has published books and written chapter contributions on global Christianity and refugee welcome; she also dabbles in poetry. She enjoys exploring global cuisine, being active outdoors, and reading during thunderstorms. Get better acquainted at cindymwu.com.

Chapter Ten:

A Christian Response to the Immigration Dilemma

REV. CINDY M. WU

With over 120 million forcibly displaced persons worldwide, the ever-worsening refugee crisis can feel like an intractable problem. A distinctly Christian response to the refugee crisis first clings to hope and trust—God is holding all things together, as mysterious as God’s ways may seem (Colossians 1:16-17). A Christian response also involves action.

Churches have long played a central role in caring for refugees. Today there is an overwhelming opportunity to love God and love neighbor through refugee ministry. Christians, of all people, should be among the first to respond. We have a special mandate: Scripture commands care for the vulnerable, with emphasis on foreigners (Zechariah 7:9-10a). We have a spiritual

heritage: we, too, were once strangers (Deuteronomy 10:19). And in caring for “the least of these,” we bear witness by vicariously ministering on behalf of Christ (Matthew 25:40).

The nations have come to North America, many as refugees fleeing war and persecution. What is God’s greater purpose for this migration flow? With the majority of refugees resettled here (in fact, the majority of all migrants globally) being Christian, could God’s purpose include revitalizing the church through believers whose faith has been tested by fire? More than ever, we should be curious about what God might be doing and how we can prayerfully respond with compassion, love, and honor.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How are our congregations and communities blessed and enhanced by the presence of immigrants and refugees?
- How is Christian faith in the West sharpened by the witness of the global church?
- What connections do you see between migration and the Great Commission?
- What biblical stories or teachings motivate or challenge you to offer welcome and hospitality to the stranger?

Additional Resources

VIDEO RESOURCES FROM THE AUTHORS OF *WELCOMING THE STRANGER*

Mission on Our Doorsteps: vimeo.com/414930215/3d60757eff

Thinking Biblically about Immigration: vimeo.com/414932059/2e65484df8

**The Most Vulnerable: Refugees, Undocumented Immigrants,
and Victims of Human Trafficking:** vimeo.com/414934111/7fe9e60c43

Understanding Immigration Policy: Past and Present:
vimeo.com/414936338/66ba85a513

Where Immigrants Come From: Addressing the Root Causes:
vimeo.com/414938639/b5b34b1012

A Christian Response to Immigration: vimeo.com/414940537/43cb173771

COVENANT RESOLUTION

2014 Annual Meeting Resolution on Immigration:
covchurch.org/resolutions/2014-immigration/

IMMIGRANT STORIES IN THE COVENANT

A Great Ambition

A 15-minute documentary about the roots of The Evangelical Covenant Church.

vimeo.com/6436445

Tim Hawkinson, Renew Covenant Church

Historical and theological perspective of pioneering Swedish immigrants chartering what would become The Evangelical Covenant Church. vimeo.com/1054175415/abd8edcc4b

“We Are an Immigrant Church”

Phil Anderson (retired North Park Theological Seminary professor) and Danny Martinez (Central Conference superintendent), *Love the Cov* podcast episode.

covchurch.org/2022/01/11/we-are-an-immigrant-church/

“Walking to Church”

Sneha Augusthy, tells her own immigration story of arriving with her mother from India and how their experience is woven through several Covenant churches.

covchurch.org/2024/09/29/walking-to-church/

“Grateful for the Journey: From Dreamer to Advocate”

By Milly Silencio, licensed Covenant clergy.

covchurch.org/2024/09/29/grateful-for-the-journey-from-dreamer-to-advocate/

Called and Gifted to Empower Others

Through cycling and advocacy, Cindy Wu empowers refugees with mobility, community, and voice, living out her call to serve and equip others in Houston and beyond.

covchurch.org/2025/03/24/called-and-gifted-to-empower-others/

RECENTLY CURATED RESOURCES

Understanding New ICE Policy on Church Access

A Covenant resource in English and Spanish.

covchurch.org/resource/understanding-ices-new-policy-on-church-access-legal-rights-and-preparedness-for-congregations/

“Welcoming the Stranger: A Covenant Tradition”

Dr. Hauna Ondrey, dean of seminary, faculty and associate professor of church history at North Park Theological Seminary calls us to remember our immigrant history and how it shapes our legacy of hospitality.

covchurch.org/2025/02/03/welcoming-the-stranger-a-covenant-tradition/

Immigrant Roots Homily

Pastor Lauren St. Martin, First Covenant Church, Seattle, WA.

vimeo.com/1053071875/31938d0198

IMMERSIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

A Migrant Journey: Scripture’s Call to Welcome the Stranger

Immigration Immersive Learning Experience along the southern Tijuana/San Diego border.

covchurch.regfox.com/a-migrant-journey-scriptures-call-to-welcome-the-stranger-2025

LEGAL SERVICE CENTERS

Open Door Immigration Services Salem, MA, was developed out of Highrock Covenant Church in partnership with Love Mercy Do Justice. odisma.org

CHET: Hispanic Center for Theological Studies has a task force on Immigration Legal Connections. chet.org

- The task force connects churches with pro bono and reputable private legal service providers, offering general immigration information and referrals. For details, contact CHET: churchlegalconnect@chet.org
- CHET also offers an eight-week certificate in Immigration Ministry and Advocacy to train advocates for immigrant communities. For details, contact CHET: churchlegalconnect@chet.org

Immigrant Connection guides churches in establishing Immigration Legal Service Centers. icwelcome.org

- They provide a toolkit to help churches welcome immigrants. icwelcome.org/welcomeprograms
- LMDJ offers grants for churches starting Immigration Legal Service Centers through Immigrant Connection. covchurch.org/resource/ministry-development-grants/

REFERENCES

2024 Evangelical Views on Immigration Study: A Survey of American Evangelicals:
research.lifeway.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/2024-Evangelical-Views-on-Immigration-Report.pdf

