

Recovering the Human Face of Immigration in the U.S. South FACILITATOR GUIDE

Supplies: powerpoint projector; flipchart with adhesive or have tape to post; markers. (note: beforehand test the working function of the projector, laptop and/or flash drive). Script in *italics* are instructions, otherwise use what is written as a guide.

SLIDE#2: INTRODUCTIONS

Welcome the participants and, a if not already done, introduce yourself/selves.

SLIDE #3: *Begin by asking the following questions (capture the responses, words or phrases on a flipchart or white/black board):* “In your context, how do people react to the word ‘immigration’? What words or feelings are evoked? *Please just say aloud, “popcorn’ style, what you have heard?.* “

After all who wish to speak have spoken (but not more than a minute), ask: “What seems to be the predominant sentiment? *(circle the words that are most similar, in most cases they will be negative).* It seems there is a pervasive language that is uncivil and dehumanizing about immigrants and by extension immigration reform. Today we seek to offer alternative ways of framing the conversation around these issues, ways which can facilitate a more nuanced, rational, and morally-informed discussion toward a more humane, common-sense about immigration and ultimately immigration policy.

SLIDE#4: *Give a brief background on the work that informs the presentation:* During 2015, with the support of a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Program for Immigration, Religion, and Social Change (PIRSC) at the University of Florida’s Center for Latin American Studies and the Jesuit Social Research Institute (JSRI) at Loyola University New Orleans organized a series of guided conversations with religious leaders from a range of Christian faith traditions who have been facilitating fruitful grass-roots experiences of inter-cultural exchange, accompaniment and hospitality, and advocacy for immigrant justice. Many of the leaders are based in the U.S. South, which has witnessed some of the most repressive anti-immigrant legislation. The conversations were set up in such a way that the religious leaders could share their experiences, which helped identified and systematized the best practices for facilitating immigrant integration and advocacy, as well as the challenges, obstacles, and shortcomings that they have faced.

GOALS:

Say: “During the next 80 minutes, as we present the findings from the report and engage you in this discussion on immigration, we hope to offer you some strategies through which your organizations, parishes and churches can tackle the challenges of immigration integration and advocacy, not only at the level of the pew and grassroots but also at the level of policy.

“Much of the negative language on immigration that you have heard is rooted in deep-seated fears and “gaps in understanding” about immigrants and immigration. These negative perceptions and feelings obscures the complex conditions that lead people to migrate, as well as the moral dilemmas this phenomenon poses to our country. Some of these fears behind the discourse need to be acknowledged while others are unfounded and need to be challenged.

SLIDE #5: “Three key questions informed the results. *Read aloud the questions.*

SLIDE #6: Read aloud the Goal for the workshop.

“The faith leaders participating in this project identified five key components or factors contributing to the negative tone of public discourse.”

SLIDE #7 : “**FEAR.** Much of the negative discourse around immigration is rooted in a fear of the other. Present-day immigrants speak different languages, practice different cultural norms and values, and, unlike many previous waves of immigrants, are sometimes perceived as refusing to assimilate into American society. The influx of immigrants into the country is seen as an invasion that threatens to undermine America’s cultural identity and security. Some Americans fear that Euro-Americans are on their way to becoming a demographic minority as a result of immigration. Since 9/11 and in the wake of the recent terror attacks immigration is increasingly conflated with national security. Some politicians point to our southern border as “porous” and “out of control,” and emphasize the need to secure our borders. These same politicians argue that until we are able to seal our borders with walls, high tech fencing and aerial drones, terrorists, criminals and carriers of infectious diseases like Ebola and Zika will cross into the United States largely undetected. The conflation of immigration with national security has also led to calls to halt the admission of refugees from Syria, prohibiting Muslims from entering the United States, and, most recently, registering Muslims already in the US.

SLIDE #8 : “**ECONOMICS.** Significant numbers of Americans view immigrants as presenting an economic threat to themselves and the country, and as taking advantage of

the system. They believe immigrants take jobs away from Americans because they're willing to work for lower wages; depress the wages of American workers; are an economic and social burden because they use social services like health care and public education but don't pay taxes; don't benefit the local economy because they send most of their earnings home; and drive down home values in the neighborhoods where they settle.

Before showing the next SLIDE (# 9), ask: "Have you heard this one?: 'The United States is a nation of laws and enforcement of the law is essential to guarantee order and stability?' What does this mean in the context of immigration? (allow for two or three responses. Reference the report to add to the responses or clarify the relevance of the phrase).

SLIDE #9 : "**RULE OF LAW.** Immigrants who arrive to the United States without authorization are often viewed as lawbreakers and criminals – that is, by circumventing the law they undermine the rule of law upon which the country's order and security depends. The sentiment is that If unauthorized immigrants want to enter the United States, they should get in line like other legal immigrants do. Additionally, immigration is sometimes associated with crime and violence, especially gang-related crime in urban areas and drug violence in border communities. Crimes committed by unauthorized immigrants are depicted in some media as representative of all immigrants.

SLIDE #10: "**IGNORANCE.** There is a general gap in knowledge regarding the dynamics that contribute to migration of people. Immigration, we know, results from a complex set of historical, economic and geopolitical factors that cannot be easily summed up in soundbites. Yet, some media and politicians (without political fallout) fill the void with their own versions of reality regarding immigration and can demonize, for example, Mexican immigrants as rapists. Similarly, the term "anchor baby" goes largely unchallenged in the media (*ASK: if anyone needs clarification on the phrase [unauthorized immigrants cannot gain citizenship through their American-born children until after they are 21 years old]*) . Finally, within faith communities there is a general lack of understanding of the theological/biblical perspectives on immigration.

SLIDE #11 : "The fifth factor that the religious leaders identified contributing to the negative dialogue was **SILENCE.** In the face of the negative public discourse about immigrants and the issue of immigration, there is a collective silence of good people, and a notable lack of a compassionate response from many faith leaders. As such, a vocal minority is able to set the terms of the debate and to dominate the conversation through

the use of negative and offensive stereotypes. This is not to ignore the efforts of many faith leaders and faith-based organizations to counter this dehumanizing and unsettling discourse. However, despite these efforts, more faith leaders and faith-based organizations need to make their voices heard to counter the increasingly negative discourse on immigration.

Before we move on to how we are to counter the negative immigration talk, do you resonate with what has just been shared? (Have a few respond and thank them for their comments)

“How then are people of faith to change the public discourse about immigrants and immigration?”

SLIDE#12: The group that met identified four key elements of a Christian approach to changing the public discourse: moving from a framework of faith and morality; dialogue with immigrants *and* with political “opponents”; communications rooted in prayer and religious symbols; and multi-faith and multi-partner collaborations.

SLIDE #13: “The first key element to changing the conversation is to do so from the perspective of **faith and morality**. That is, all efforts should be rooted in Scripture which allows an appeal to all the “people of the book” (i.e., Jews, Christian and Muslims).

Migration is central to the history of the Hebrew people and their exodus from Egypt: these migrants and refugees become privileged people of God’s favor and protection. In the Old Testament we also find another group of people that has God’s favor, the “**anawin**”, the little ones, originally those “overwhelmed by want”. This group is comprised of widows, orphans and strangers (i.e., refugees, sojourners, migrants, immigrants): the poor and powerless in society.

Read or have some read aloud Exodus 22: 20-22: You shall not molest or oppress an alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt. You shall not wrong any widow or orphan. If ever you wrong them and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry.

Ask: What is Yaweh’s relationship to this vulnerable and excluded population? Allow for two or three short responses. “Yahweh is seen as the protector of the anawin.

The Hebrew tradition of the **Jubilee** also reflects the mandate to free the debtors and captives and to bring all people into unity with God in their midst. It is embodied in forgiveness and reconciliation in Christian belief and practice and in amnesty and pardon in criminal law.

The scriptural emphasis on **hospitality** of the stranger, reflected in the story of Abraham and Sarah welcoming God in the three strangers in *Genesis 18:1-15* as well in the great parable of the Last Judgement in *Matthew 25 (v. 31-46)*, itself reflects the hospitality of God in providing the creation for humanity.

Ask: “What other verses or passages in the NT comes to mind regarding this topic (*i.e.*, *faith and morality in regards to the migrant*)?” Write on the flipchart/newprint any that are mentioned.

Sum up: “ It is evident that throughout the Scriptures the importance of communion among all people over-against divisions based on tribe, language, nationality, race, gender, and even religion.

This reading of the Scriptures by many Christian leaders provides a wealth of material for reflection and dialogue among Christians and in the public square. In traditional Catholic thought it is buttressed in centuries-old philosophical and theological principles based on **human dignity, the rights** flowing from that identity, and the common good.

SLIDE#14: “Christian organizations and denominations as well as significant religious leaders have come out publicly in affirming the human dignity of all, the membership of all in the human family and the citizenship of all in the global community.

“Within framework of faith and morality we are invited to respond to the prevalence of fear whether those fears be economic, cultural, racial, or political.

SLIDE #15: “Three kinds of **Dialogue** were considered important to changing the public discourse on immigration. The first kind entails active listening to each other stories, done within a faith context, can help move the discussion beyond stereotypes and soundbites (“tweets”). Often such interaction can do more to change perceptions about immigrants than sermons or other messaging.

Another form of dialogue can arise out of joint efforts of outreach and service to and with immigrants. Trusting relationship forged by working together can provide the way to open and honest conversations about immigration.

A third form of dialogue is between believers who differ on the issue of immigrants and immigration. Without demonizing the opposition but seeking to understand that there are truths on both sides of the issue can prove fruitful in the context of dialogue and respect.

SLIDE #16: “Communication in all forms (print media, mass media, social media, post-card campaigns, etc.) can be useful in injecting faith-filled values into the discussion, especially through the telling of immigrant ‘stories’. More over, the power of prayer and religious symbols to convey powerful faith-messaging and encourage faith-advocates themselves cannot be underestimated. Days of prayer and fasting, prayer for or over elected officials, Holy Week pilgrimages that highlight the difficulties of immigrant life, Stations of the Cross before key venues such as detention centers and jails, are a few examples. Included here are: crosses planted in the desert where immigrants have died.

Ask: Might there be one or two examples of similar ways of communicating that someone can share with us? (write examples on the space provided)

SLIDE #17: There are two kinds of collaborations that critical to changing the immigration discussion. The first is **multi-faith collaboration** in which congregations and religious leaders join hands to influence public opinion and public officials. Events like the National Migration Week and Ecumenical Advocacy Days are examples of such. Ideally, this kind of collaboration would be leveraging the respective resources of those involved to build *movements* for the long-haul as the process of change is a long-term endeavor, especially in the light of recent political posturing to demonize immigrants and foreigners and the proclivity of many Christians to remain silent.

Multi-sectoral engagement is a second kind of collaboration bringing together faith communities with business owners, unions, law enforcement, elected officials, civic organizations, civil rights groups and, of course, immigrants (documented or not). Again, these coalitions would need to invest for the long-term endeavor to influence public policy.

SLIDE #18: In addressing the challenge of how to more effectively integrate immigrants into existing faith communities and/or in the development of new forms of worshipping congregations, the language of “welcoming” seems best to describe the initial stage of the desired goal of unity of members of the body of Christ, (i.e., “building the beloved community”). “Inclusion” then might be a better way of identifying the long-range goal of any process of welcoming.

There are various models employed among various denominations to welcome new immigrants. The models depend in part on the denomination of the faith community (Evangelical, Catholic, Protestant, etc.), partly on the national and racial/ethnic background of the persons received and receiving, partly on the availability and skills of formal religious leaders (usually those “ordained” or otherwise chosen for leadership in the denomination), and partly upon the receptivity of receiving congregations to the newcomers and vice-versa. Each model, understandably, has its strengths and its challenges, no one model is “better” than others, at least in the early stages of welcoming new immigrants. As new generations of immigrant families grew up, their own and their parents’ preferences for a particular faith community model might well differ or evolve and even that parents’ preferences for their children might cause them to choose a different community to meet their children’s needs or their desires for their children (such as maintaining cultural identity).

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Briefly describe each model (see the Report). You might ask for examples from the participants (this may include variations of those identified).

Before transition to the next slide, state “The report identified a number of common challenges within these various approaches when attempting to blend traditional congregants with new immigrants or to promote collaboration among congregations: language barriers; cultural and aesthetic differences; class and generational divides; divergent worship styles; leadership and power sharing; equitable use of resources and facilities; and theological pluralism.

What then are the elements of effective welcoming of new immigrants that in turn will lead to greater inclusion? At least six key areas of effective welcoming were identified that are crucial for eventual inclusion of newcomers into faith communities. for Again, for both welcoming communities and newcomers this process is a long-term journey.

SLIDE #20: At least six key areas of effective welcoming were identified that are crucial for eventual inclusion of newcomers into faith communities. Again, for both welcoming communities and newcomers this process is a journey.

Elaboration of the six areas can occur either as a group or divide the participants into six smaller groups each taking on one key element. If the latter, give the groups 10 minutes to work on what the element means in the context of inclusion with possible examples. Then take another 5 minutes in plenary for a report out.

If the former (working on the each as a group) then after naming each key element ask: "What does this mean in the context of inclusion?" (you might want to capture some of the responses on the flipchart/board)

Augment the responses with material from the Report. Be prepared to spend a little more time on "Skilled Leadership"

SLIDE #21 The leaders of all major faith traditions have called for compassionate treatment of immigrants. In addition, many Christian congregations in the U.S. South have become ethnically diverse communities of faith due to increased membership of undocumented Latino immigrants. Yet it is rare for Christian communities in the South, even those with significant numbers of undocumented immigrant members, to engage in immigrant justice advocacy.

For many for people of faith, advocacy is way of putting their faith into action. By advocacy we mean those activities by an individual or group which aim to influence decisions within political, economic, and social systems and institutions. Because so many of our nation's immigrants are undocumented - approximately one-fourth - most advocacy efforts regarding immigration on the part of faith leaders have to do with addressing or reforming aspects of our nation's broken immigration system.

Based on the report elaborate on each of the points listed in the slide

SLIDE #22 Four “case studies” from the U.S. South demonstrate that meaningful experiences between immigrants and Americans can indeed lead faith communities to become actively involved in immigrant justice advocacy. Let me highlight some of the salient results from those encounters.

SLIDE #23 “Holy Spirit Church, Rio Grande, Texas” *Elaborate from the Report as needed on each of the key actions/activities.*

SLIDE #24 “Alterna Community in La Grange, Georgia” *Elaborate from the Report as needed on each of the key actions/activities.*

SLIDE #25 “Catholic Teach-Ins on Migration” *Elaborate from the Report as needed on each of the key actions/activities.*

SLIDE #26 “Greystone Community Church, Gwinnett, Georgia” *Elaborate from the Report as needed on each of the key actions/activities.*

SLIDE #27 “St. Thomas the Apostle, Atlanta, Georgia” *Elaborate from the Report as needed on each of the key actions/activities.*

SLIDE #28: Concluding Remarks:

Almost every step of an undocumented immigrant’s life is weighed down by the heavy burden of lack of legal status. In June 2016 millions of undocumented immigrants’ hopes that their burden of illegality would be lifted, at least temporarily, were shattered by the Supreme Court’s 4-4 tie vote on President Obama’s executive actions on immigration.

In the coming months and years, the leadership and voice of faith leaders can be instrumental in finally bringing about the change that will allow our undocumented immigrant brothers and sisters to live in peace and dignity. For this to happen, faith leaders will need to be willing to advocate for just and humane immigration reform. It is our hope that this time has provided you with ideas and resources that can help accomplish this goal.

SLIDE #29 Final Words: *Read aloud the words of DREAMer Estella Martinez*

