

Three Ways to Approach Immigration and Migration with Teens

“...for I was a stranger and you welcomed me...”

Matthew 25:35

by Elizabeth Sanchez

1. What Comes First: Being Catholic or Being American?

- **Challenge** your teens to think about why we are first Catholics and then Americans and not the other way around.
- **Explore** the question: Where is our citizenship? Guide them to answer: Our citizenship is in Heaven. The Church herself is considered a pilgrim people on a journey to God. If we are pilgrims, where are we headed? Where do we belong?
- **Scripture:** (*Philippians 3:20*) *“We are citizens of heaven, and we eagerly wait for our Savior.”*
(*Eph 2:17-20*) *“...no longer strangers but citizens in and through God...”*
- **Discuss** the reality of the United States of America as a true immigrant country using the following quotes from “Strangers No Longer”:
 - *“America is a continent born of immigrant peoples who...gave birth to new civilizations.”*
 - *“Migrants and immigrants are in our parishes and in our communities...we see much injustice and violence against them and much suffering and despair among them because civil and church structures are still inadequate to accommodate their basic needs.”*
 - *“Our common faith in Jesus Christ moves us to search for ways that favor a spirit of solidarity.”*
- **Activity:** Have students tell about their own heritage. Encourage them to think how their grandparents or great-grandparents suffered when first arriving to this country.
- **Activity:** Have the students come up with ways that they can practice being first a Catholic and second an American.

2. The Law of God or the Law of the Government

Although the Church is not a legal body, it can make statements that uphold moral law if civil law inhibits moral law.

- **Explain** the difference between moral law (the law of God) and civil law.
- **Challenge** the teens with the question: What is the Catholic Church’s stance on migration and immigration? Look at the principles below and discuss them. Use the verses that refer to our Christian duty towards foreigners.
 - *“Five Principles of Migration in Light of the Catholic Faith*
 - *Persons have the right to find opportunities in their homeland to support themselves in a dignified manner*
 - *Persons have the right to migrate to support themselves and their families*
 - *Sovereign nations have the right to control their borders*
 - *Refugees and asylum seekers should be afforded protection*
 - *The human dignity and human rights of undocumented migrants should be respected and not violated”*
- **Encourage** the teens to consider the following questions:
 - How do we fight for just laws?
 - What is our civic responsibility as Catholics?
- (*Is 10:1-2*) *God’s judgment upon those who make unjust laws*

3. Even Jesus was an immigrant

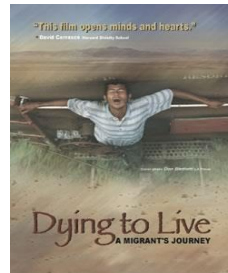
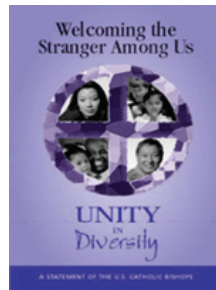
The Mystery of the Incarnation is an awesome way to discuss migration. Jesus “migrated” to us from Heaven and become a “stranger” to those around him. He who was not sin, became sin.

- **Challenge** students to look into the Old Testament and recall stories of migration.
- **Discuss:** What do the scriptures say about where we came from? What do the scriptures say about how we should treat immigrants?
- **Scripture:**
 - (Ex 23:9) “...do not mistreat foreigners...”
 - (Dt 10:19) “...you were once foreigners in Egypt...”
 - (Lv 19:33-34) “...love foreigners as you would yourself...”
 - (Mt 25:35) “...for I was a stranger and you welcomed me...”
- **Activity:** Read the Story about Joseph and Mary looking for room at the inn. Discuss the flight into Egypt.

Additional Resources

Helpful Church Documents

- U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops in conjunction with the Mexican Bishops’ Conference [*Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*](#), 2003
- The Catholic Bishops of the United States, [*Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity*](#), November 2000
- Pope John Paul II [*Ecclesia in America*](#), January 22, 1999
- Pope John Paul II, [*Annual Message for World Migration Day*](#), 1996



Videos

[*One Border One Body: Immigration and the Eucharist*](#) (30 mins.) available to borrow through the OYCYAM,

[*Dying to Live: A Migrant's Journey*](#) (30 mins.)

Websites

[The Catholic Campaign for Immigration Reform](#)

[Education for Justice](#)

[Human Trafficking](#)

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