

Church and Migration: I was a stranger and you welcomed me (Matthew 25)

Formatiert: Zeilenabstand:
Doppelt

Reflections from the Ohio Conference United Church of Christ, USA

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Introduction:

The United States of America is a country of immigrants. The vast majority of people are descendants of immigrants. Those few native people are the scattered remains of the tens of millions who died after in the genocide begun under Columbus in 1492 and continued well into the 20th century, with the exceptions of folks with Native American backgrounds, trace back their roots to a different country and culture. Historically speaking ethnic groups came in waves- and people from the same culture and language stay together in urban enclaves to keep their traditions, customs and also language alive, but within one or two generations usually assimilated into the new culture. Another reason they stayed together was mutual protection by the previously established migrant population.

Formatiert: Hochgestellt

In the majority of cases, many migrants work in jobs which barely pay minimum wages. Much of the produce we eat is picked or processed by people earning less than minimum wages. Many people working in kitchens, on construction sites, in hospitality service (cleaning in hotels or houses) or in the health care system are people with migration background. The economy would collapse if migrants, without the low wage labor the migrants provided by the millions now residing in the US, willing to work for little money, would cease to continue to contribute to the

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~~society. It is increasing more difficult to find workers for low entry jobs.~~ Often migrant workers are exploited. They live in fear. They do not organize or complain about the unjust labor condition out of fear of losing their job and being deported. In the summer, many migrants pick fruit and vegetables, or work seasonal jobs in landscaping. Migrants are vital to the wellbeing of the society. They are also indispensable sources of wealth to the societies from which they come as first generations migrants frequently send significant amounts of money to their relatives back home in their country of origin. -

Due to the current political climate, fewer migrants are processed at the border and can stay legally in the US. Many people who are migrants or refugees and staying in the country illegally, live in constant fear of deportation. The number of refugees is decreasing. The tension of the political climate is increasing. Teachers tell me, that children of migrant parents live in constant fear that their parents might have been deported while they are at school. They carry in their backpack a piece of paper with an address on it. This is not the place they live, but of people offering a safe place in case the parents are no longer home.

In the state of Ohio ~~most many~~ people claim German heritage- we find many German themed festivals, restaurants, and artifacts. One main historical strand of the United Church of Christ is 'Evangelical Reformed' - the German Reformierte Kirche. Many church services were held in German ~~until~~ World War II. Due to the political climate names of streets and town were changed to English names and the German language ~~quickslowly~~ disappeared from the public sphere.

The United Church of Christ is one of the most progressive mainline churches in the US. It always has taken stands on socio- political issues and sees its role to voice a biblical prophetic voice protecting the vulnerable and marginalized. The National Church, gathered at national

synod every two years, speaks TO the church and not FOR the church. Each local church can decide if and how much they are going to follow these resolutions. The UCC polity is congregational, —i.e. each church governs autonomously and in covenantal relationship to other churches. How to live out this balance between autonomy and covenant is a constant challenge. Each congregation and its pastoral leadership answers on their own, —which makes it difficult both on an intra church basis as well as on an inter church basis to find a ‘UCC declaration representing all UCC churches’.

What challenges and opportunities does the issue of church and migration present in the special context of our church?

The United Church of Christ has always been a church focused on justice issues.:

Some Ohio UCC churches offer practical help. Almost all UCC churches do, even the more conservative ones.

Some UCC churches: ~~they~~ offer space and volunteers to teach English as a Second Language (ESL), offer legal aid, help navigating government bureaucracy, offer tutoring or after school programs for the children, and work~~ing in cooperation~~ with local refugee agencies. Even some more conservativ

Some Ohio UCC churches offer sanctuary. A cCouple of months ago, one UCC church in Columbus offered sanctuary~~asylum~~ to a woman and her children. She was able to be safe while she living in hiding at the church for several weeks. The whole congregation helped to ensure safety, food and shelter for this woman and her children.

Some UCC churches 'adopt' a migrant family—in cooperation with the [Refugee and Immigration services](#), individual churches welcome the family at the airport, help finding and furnishing an apartment, help with transportation to and from agencies and make sure the family feels welcome.

Some UCC churches share their church building and space with Christians from other faith traditions¹ and nationalities. People worship in the sanctuary not only on Sunday morning, but on Saturday and on Sunday afternoon and from time to time all three Christian churches offer common worship experiences and all church and community activities.

Some UCC churches offer Mission Trips to the [Southern border](#) and to [Mexico and Central America](#). This 'hands on' work focuses not only on helping with material [assistance](#), but also to raise awareness and to learn more about the living conditions of people who are desperately looking for a new home².

Some UCC churches work together with other local denominations or civic groups to build bridges between those families who have migrated here for many generations and those who just arrived from other countries.

Some UCC churches play an active role in advocacy work with migrants at the Southern border as they demonstrate against the conditions at the detention centers [or to inhibit the building of](#)

¹ [There are many more Christian denominations in the United States than in Germany. In many places churches from different faith traditions work closely together to work for justice in the local communities.](#)

² Heidelberg University which is closely tied to the UCC, offers a program where student can learn more about the situation of migrants at the border. Students travel and stay at the Southern border. They either play with the children who are living at an detention center or they are translating personal stories of migrants who are applying to gain status and protection as a refugee. They share their traumatic experiences with the officers and the students translate as if they are directly experiencing what happened with 1- statements ('I fled because...' or 'I was beaten...') To listen and to translate these personal stories in the first person is very emotional.

"the wall". Some active resistance work means to leave out water in the middle of the desert, as well as provide legal representation before immigration officials.

Some UCC churches sent representatives to and worked on resolutions at various General Synods where issues of Immigration was discussed and resolutions passed (<http://uccfiles.com/pdf/g29-14.pdf>).

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What perspective arise for churches today from biblical witness?

Migration is related to our faith stories. Migration is a faith issue. Migration is an issue for churches and Christians. Migration is a justice issue. Migration is a human rights issue.

Migration is a theological issue. However, in the public sphere, migration is often only seen as an economic or domestic politic related issue.

a) Migration is closely related to our faith stories.

Throughout the Bible we read stories of people who are on a journey. The red thread throughout the many stories of our ancestors of faith is God's promise: "I am with you always" (Isaiah 41:10). The promise made to Abram continues to be kept throughout the many generations and centuries and political changes. Times change- but God stays loyal to the promise. Our God is not restricted to a place, but continues to be steadfast and attached to God's people.

Throughout the history of Hebrew Scripture, continuing with Jesus, God keeps the promise of God's faithfulness. Even after Jesus' death, this promise is kept- and wherever people are gathering in Christ's name, God is present. God keeps the promise: "I am with you wherever you go (Mathew 28:20)". From the first to the last book of the Bible we hear that God is faithful, that God continues to be with the people - regardless of any circumstances. Our faith stories are not restricted to political or national borders, but God's promises are for all people regardless of

nationality, ethnic background, or other human made boundaries. If churches see the “world” and the “word” through the ‘nationalist’ lens, they are missing what it means to be sisters in brothers in Christ the point of the global Church and therefore do not value the other person, regardless of nationality or background, as a brother or sister created and loved by God (Romans 12:10).

b) Migration is a theological issue

The cross is the common symbol for the Christian faith. It represents more than the Roman method of torture or the cross Jesus died on. The vertical line represents also God’s interaction with the world and our connection to God. The horizontal line represents Jesus’ outstretching arms to the world- or how we care for one another. Both axes are connected- and both are sides of the same coin. One cannot live without the other. The responsibility of each Christian is to live at the point where the vertical and horizontal line connect: How do we live out our faith to God in the world? How do we combine our personal faith as disciples of Christ in the world? How are we the voices of the voiceless in a world filled with noise? How do we as Christians are disciples of Christ and ‘welcome the stranger’ (Matthew 25:35)?

c) Migration is an issue for churches and Christians

Migration is a global issue. However, many times it is seen as a ~~domestic~~ ‘national’ issue ~~with~~ and we focus on scarcity and fear. The media, ~~advertisement~~ and the political ~~establishment~~ ~~administration~~ keeps repeating the message: We don’t have enough. ~~We need more. We can’t take more migrants. We don’t have space.~~ We are fearful of ~~sharing with (and sharing with)~~ the other.

The ~~B~~iblical narrative stands in ~~starker~~ contrast to this negative and fearful message. The challenge is to focus on and to share God’s abundant blessings instead of focus on what we

don't have. There is a strong dialectic between the 'word' and the 'world': Instead of trusting in God, we are constantly told to be scared of each other. The challenge of the churches is to be the living example to provide opportunities for all, be a living example of joy, peace, hope and love (These are the names of the four Sundays in Advent).

The Good News of the Gospel is that God so much LOVED the WORLD that he gave his only son (John 3:16). God loves the world, God provides plenty for all of us, God blesses us abundantly.

As churches we need to ask: Where is God amongst us? How does God want us to live faithfully in community? How do we experience joy which is like the 'overflowing cup' (Psalm 23)? In the household of God, there is more than enough for all. It is the responsibility of those who have more to give to those who have less. We are accountable to share our blessings with our brothers and sisters, who are all God's beloved children. To share with the least of those is a biblical mandate- no questions asked.

As stewards we are responsible to live faithfully in the world and to share God's blessings with others (1 Corinthians 4:2, 1 Peter 4:10). You cannot live out stewardship³ and keep all the blessings for yourself, because "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

³ Since the churches are structured and financed so differently than in Germany, first come background information on financial practice of churches. The churches have an annual 'Stewardship' campaign. Since each church is financed solely by donations of its members (being a member of the church means that you support the church by offering time, talents and financial gifts. All expenses of the church, including the salary of the pastors, is paid for by the members through the weekly offerings as part of the worship service). This means that depending on the make up of the congregation, clergy are not as free to speak publicly or preach about current socio-political issues. The survival of churches is dependent on the size, generosity and membership of the congregation. Often the leadership of the local church compares church to a business: The aim is to gain more members, because more members mean more money in the budget. Sometimes pastors compete with each other and ask: How big is your membership? What is your budget? These questions only relate to measurable numbers, but do not reflect how God is active in the life of the church or how this church lives out God's call in the community.

The UCC concept of Stewardship differs significantly from the practice in the Evangelische

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However, this thinking in measurable terms and numbers is not based on any biblical or

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theological reflection, but purely on financial terms and in rooted in scarcity. The Biblical term "stewardship" goes far beyond the walls of the building. Stewardship includes how to live and to share God's blessings with the world, and that includes caring for the least amongst us.

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I am reminded of the popular hymn, written by Edwin O. Excell (1897): "Count your blessings".

The refrain invites us to: "Count your blessings, name them one by one, count your blessings,

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see what God has done! Count your blessings, name them one by one, count your many blessings, see what God has done.” This hymn is sung often during Thanksgiving time, but also throughout the year to remind us to count our blessings and to focus upon on God’s abundance instead of and worrying about tomorrow (Matthew 6:24).

All faith stories in the Bible used to be ~~stories~~ orally ~~transmitted~~ from one generation to the next. As the apostle Paul writes: “Faith comes from listening and listening through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17). The majority of people in the US ~~, all~~ have been strangers at some point;⁴ many churches are rooted in traditions taken from their native countries. ~~Until~~ now, even though the UCC was formed in 1957, ~~there are still remnants of you still experience its origins from either the~~ German- Reformed ~~elements and structures are still evident in worship style and governance. or the Congregational- Christian tradition in their style of worship and in ‘how church’ is done.~~

⁴ ~~Too often people forget that their personal story- at some point in not so distant history their ancestors were migrants as well. It seems that once people are established, they do not remember the hardship of the past, and how their ancestors dependent on hospitality of others.~~

We all learn faith stories as they are told from one generation to the next. We share orally Bible stories and how these stories formed the faith of our ancestors in faith. Some churches continue the traditions of 'witnesses of faith' as people share their faith stories. It is always powerful to hear other people share their own faith stories and how they witness God's presence in their lives. This sharing of faith) or witnessing stewards) happens either during worship (maybe as part of the Stewardship campaign) or as part of Lenten reflections or Faith formation.

Instead of members of the congregation telling their stories to other members of the congregation, it would be really powerful to listen to a faith story from a different country. How did your faith sustain you through hardship of fleeing your own country? We could learn so much from other Christians in the world who are hoping to better their lives in a strange land. All of us can be so enriched by listening to each other's faith stories.

Christians are called not only to do charity, but to do justice. We are charged not only to take care of the stranger amongst us (Luke 10: 25-37), but also to ask more challenging questions: Why do these conditions exist? We are to live according to the Chinese proverb: "Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime".

We as Christians inside and outside the churches do not only have a pastoral role, but also a prophetic role which includes pointing out injustice and speaking up for God: We need to follow what the prophet Micah asks of us: "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8).

How do we want to be and shape the church in future in our culturally and religiously diverse society?

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If we are faithful witnesses to Jesus' love, and believe that Jesus offers new life, we as the church need to offer an alternative to the message of scarcity. How do we offer the message of abundance, inclusivity and welcome to all? How do we as a faith community offer and live out the alternative to what the world teaches- abundance instead of scarcity, opportunities for all instead of negativity and excluding others from the table.

Churches are based on Scripture. Scripture is our guideline for how to live. Scripture is our foundation of how God wants us to live as faithful disciples in the world. Often the media portrays a certain kind of Christianity which supports national politics and not the global mission of the church. It is our responsibility as churches and theologians to re-discover Scripture, to offer a faith-based alternative to 'easy' answers and to teach God's love anew. As we read and dig deeper into Scripture, we realize that God is intimately interwoven with our lives and with the people around us. We are all 'strangers in a strange land' (Exodus 2:22).

How can we support one another in our mission as churches at the local level and as the world community of the people of God?

Churches want to be welcoming. Lots of churches offer individual welcoming statements from their congregations. These statements are printed and published on their websites, in their Sunday bulletins, on all the printed material or proclaimed on banners hung in front of the church.

The challenge is how do we live out the 'radical hospitality' beyond welcoming all to worship on Sunday morning. The UCC published a free downloadable resource for churches called:

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“Extravagant welcome: ~~Aa~~ training guide for ~~greeters~~”⁵. ~~Although As important it is to~~ welcom~~inge~~ guests for worship ~~in undeniably important,~~—this welcome ~~must goe~~s far beyond Sunday morning ~~and singing hymns of different backgrounds and nationalities in our worship services~~.

Churches want to be engaged in their local communities. Many churches are engaged in local, national or international missions. They cooperate with the local schools and offer tutoring children at public schools⁶.

The challenge however is to reach beyond charity and to be involved in justice work. Because Jesus’s voice of love is mercy and justice. These are two sides of the same coin. As we read the gospel stories in its context, we realize that Jesus was intimately immersed in his culture and offered much more than personal ~~salvation~~⁷. Many Christians in the US focus on the personal relationship to Christ and seem to neglect the meaning behind the stories Jesus told.

We need to re-discover the Bible stories ~~and to~~ be in awe of the social implications of each story. As we help with ~~ree~~—reading the Bible stories and help to understand the meaning behind certain terms, we discover how God is interwoven with the people then and how God is continuing to be at work in and through us. One of the mottos of the UCC is: “God is still speaking”. ~~Contrary to the belief of many Christians who focus only on their individual~~

⁵ <https://www.uccresources.com/products/extravagant-welcome?variant=1133881332>

⁶ My children attend the local public schools in our community. We live in what appears to be an upper middle class suburb. There is no obvious evidence of poverty. However, according to statistics, every third child in our school system receives decreased or free lunches. Important school documents are translated into Spanish, and Somali due the high population of Somali refugees in our area. Free translation is available to all ~~students-nonnative English speaking students and families~~.

⁷ Many people talk about salvation, but don’t realize that the word salvation derives from the Latin word salve-meaning: ‘bringing healing’. Our task as theologians is to ‘translate’ terms frequently used into language which is easily understood and to ask ‘God questions’: How does healing happen in the story? How does healing happen now? Where is God in the story? Where is God now?

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relationship to Christ, we need to stress that Christ message is ongoing and ever evolving to meet the challenge of societies.

Individual members of the UCC and indeed whole congregations who fail to recognize this cannot be faithful to the mission and message of the UCC.

We as the leaders of the church need to foster the desire to discover God's work in our lives and how God wants us to live in the community. Our task as the church is to be examples of what this common life in faith can look like as we offer opportunities to grow in faith, to be disciples of Christ and advocates for justice.

To quote from

Using the words ~~the of the~~ "United Church of Christ Statement of Faith,⁸: "God calls us into the church to accept the cost and joy of discipleship, to be servants in the service of the whole human family, to proclaim the gospel to all the world and resist the powers of evil, to share in Christ's baptism and eat at his table, to join him in his passion and victory.

"God promises to all who trust in the gospel forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace, courage in the struggle for justice and peace, the presence of the Holy Spirit in trial and rejoicing, and eternal life in that kingdom which has no end."

There are some parallels between issues of migration in the EkvW and the UCC churches in Ohio. In Germany however, churches have more power and responsibilities as a service organizations to the public. There are many denominations and churches in the US, the UCC is

⁸ https://www.ucc.org/beliefs_statement-of-faith#MOSS

one them ⁹. The UCC has a unique role since it is one of the most progressive churches and always been concerned about social justice issues. The UCC is often one of the only churches taking a stand on current and social issues.

In conclusion, the role of the church is to offer an alternative voice and experiences to the prevalent public opinion that we don't have enough and live in scarcity and fear. The US is the richest country in the world and as Christians we are responsible to share from our resources and not only focus on domestic economy, but see all people globally as God's people and be concerned of their wellbeing. However, due to the financial structure of the churches in the US, many congregations are more concerned about their own financial status than being involved in social justice. Some local UCC congregations are to go back to the UCC main messages in order to live out the covenantal relationship to other churches in their Association, Conference as well as national connections.

The motto of the United Church of Christ is: "That they all may be one" (John 17:21). Let us all be united in finding ways to include all, especially the stranger amongst us "for our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:20).

~~God calls the worlds into being, creates humankind in the divine image, and sets before us the ways of life and death.~~

~~God seeks in holy love to save all people from aimlessness and sin.~~

~~God judges all humanity and all nations by that will of righteousness declared through prophets and apostles.~~

⁹ In the suburb I am living in, there are 28 different churches, most of them mainline, but also at least 10 who are non- denominational churches.

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~~In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, our crucified and risen Lord, God has come to us and shared our common lot, conquering sin and death and reconciling the whole creation to its Creator.~~

~~God bestows upon us the Holy Spirit, creating and renewing the church of Jesus Christ, binding in covenant faithful people of all ages, tongues, and races.~~

~~God calls us into the church to accept the cost and joy of discipleship, to be servants in the service of the whole human family, to proclaim the gospel to all the world and resist the powers of evil, to share in Christ's baptism and eat at his table, to join him in his passion and victory.~~

~~God promises to all who trust in the gospel forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace, courage in the struggle for justice and peace, the presence of the Holy Spirit in trial and rejoicing, and eternal life in that kingdom which has no end.~~

~~Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto God.~~

~~Amen.~~

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~~United Church of Christ Statement of Faith in the form of a doxology~~

~~We believe in you, O God, Eternal Spirit, God of our Savior Jesus Christ and our God, and to your deeds we testify:~~

~~You call the worlds into being, create persons in your own image, and set before each one the ways of life and death.~~

~~You seek in holy love to save all people from aimlessness and sin.~~

~~You judge people and nations by your righteous will declared through prophets and apostles.~~

~~In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, our crucified and risen Savior, you have come to us and shared our common lot, conquering sin and death and reconciling the world to yourself.~~

~~You bestow upon us your Holy Spirit, creating and renewing the church of Jesus Christ, binding in covenant faithful people of all ages, tongues, and races.~~

~~You call us into your church to accept the cost and joy of discipleship, to be your servants in the service of others, to proclaim the gospel to all the world and resist the powers of evil, to share in Christ's baptism and eat at his table, to join him in his passion and victory.~~

~~You promise to all who trust you forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace, courage in the struggle for justice and peace, your presence in trial and rejoicing, and eternal life in your realm which has no end.~~

~~Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto you.~~

~~Amen.~~

~~One of the motto of the United Church of Christ is: God is still speaking or Never put a period where God puts a comma. God continuously is interwoven in and with the world. God is no~~

~~The UCC statement of faith states:~~

~~**Faithful to witness of JEsus rehearsal of LIVE**~~

~~**Personally engaged to offer alternative NO to scarcity**~~

~~**You cannot make polticis with JEsus (sermon on mount)**~~

~~**Confuse politics and partisanship that means we care Christian theology mostly about after people die**~~

~~**If primary understanding of JEsus is hereafter than it disengeanges of LIFE NOW**~~

~~**As CHristians we God is permanant- god interwesaves (Mathh 26)**~~

~~live in the world, but are not of the world.~~

~~to be the voice of the voicele~~

~~The US is the riches country in the world and~~

~~We in the church need to focus on the abundance of God's blessings instead of joining the~~

~~Theology of abundance our attitude towards world: opportunity~~

~~Scarcity fear closure, not being enough~~

~~Avert and subtle dialectic operation in human experience'~~

~~Biblical narrative~~

~~Proverbs "ow whatever what" God will provide;~~

~~Even in Exile w/even kicked out of Eden~~

~~Starts out in abundance—goodness~~

~~How people are thinking of US richest country in world—operating of scarcity (political)~~

~~Faithful to witness of Jesus rehearsal of LIFE~~

~~Personally engaged to offer alternative NO to scarcity~~

~~You cannot make politics with Jesus (sermon on mount)~~

~~Confuse politics and partisanship that means we care Christian theology mostly about
after people die~~

~~If primary understanding of Jesus is hereafter than it disengages of LIFE NOW~~

~~As Christians we God is permanent—god intervenes (Matthew 26)~~

~~When are you marginalized, and respond~~

~~PASTORAL question: how do we teach well?~~

~~Language of faith and unpack~~

~~Salvation: healing... how does healing happen~~

~~Coincidence of love is mercy and justice (charity and welfare system—otherwise reputation)~~

~~Immigrant is sustaining me of the food I eat—~~

~~Economic results~~

~~We lost the sense that migrants make the household function~~

~~Greed and fear feed on each other~~

~~Greed distorted view of what is necessary of what it means for me to be complete-happy~~

~~Materialistic amret: you are not enough, you don;t have enough~~

~~Church to be countercultural- depending on congregation and pastor~~

~~How to teach and lead culture--~~

~~Faith and culture are onto the same~~

~~Transform narrative~~

~~Being a american and CHristian are not the same~~

~~Rob Bell God bless America~~

~~Is america blessing God~~

~~Are we living congruent with values of Jesus and spirit that reverses narrative of ear as
primitive operative energy~~

~~Statement of faith~~

~~Joy and responsibility of Chrstitam~~

~~Synod: speaks to the church~~

~~Visiob: all ages, tongues and races challengeL justice and peace~~

~~Dialogue- conversation, one to one~~

~~Not what's legal, but what;s moral~~

Life of love congruent of life in world

How to start conversation' hw do we listen to JEsus and be open to challenges

Synod

Do we want to be connected?

Avoid conflict? Fear of change?

God is at live

How my mind has changed? Lenten?

Orientalism, disorientation, reorganisation

Reality: arrival for all time— life is dynamic

David and Salome

God is with you— red thread from Abraham till Pentecost

Hebrew memoir Holy memory allowign memory about care for others similar positioned in life (HEbrew)

Unless you are Native American, you are an imigrant oe generation or two we forget where you are from

Privilege

~~App: Kiersten Bailey-- restaurant by immigrants~~

~~<https://www.crisohio.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Refugee-Immigrant-Businesses.pdf>~~

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~~Cross-vertical horizontal;~~

~~Our resistance to migration is resistance to holy intersection?~~

~~I-thou-buber closer than and intersection~~

~~Our immigration-its-or-thou~~

~~Are they precious, beloved or them-not us~~

~~German experience very different--~~

~~Depends on proximity of people who lookd feel sound different~~

~~NY-C or Los Atlanta~~

~~US migration background-- dependend who is the omst recent immigrant- to~~

~~God loves variety-- we are all beauty~~

~~Migration about savoring beautiful diversity of God loved and created~~

~~Continues to be created—diversity adaptive, God is hange—am beoming who I am
becoming~~

~~Diffent cutlrue~~

~~Culture according to calendar and therefore we assume church has to follow~~

~~Challenge of not christendom~~

~~What nature of good news, gospel? IF gospel is about our life together,~~

~~We ahve to learn more to be alternative movement-- not waht media portrays us~~

~~Pg 38 of document~~

~~Who is the stranger? Theologically speaking we are all strangers--~~

~~Depending on passport, we are all strangers at some point~~

~~Schools at least 3 language—Church only 1~~

~~Lisa Bowersock—reaching out and Marion where she staying etc~~

~~Messy middle~~

Formatiert: Links, Zeilenabstand:
Doppelt

Introduction: “I was a stranger and you welcomed me” – Matthew 25:35

—— For most in the United States, there is a history of having been a stranger. The challenge is that often such experiences are buried in the stories of one’s ancestors. There is a strange conundrum that occurs with establishment. It seems that once one has been established in a particular location for more than a generation or two the memory grows thin regarding the fundamental commonality of having the experience of being an immigrant or a refugee.

—— The United States has a history of shifting narratives when it comes to what or who is strange when it comes to culture, customs, and things as basic as appearance. The challenge has always been and remains how to see “the other” as a sibling in the human family. The context of the United States as a primarily of immigrants offers an interesting contrast to the statistic that in 2016, 22.5 percent of the population in Germany had a migration background. For most in the US having a migration background at some level would be presumed, though often not remembered, as is evidenced in attitudes toward those who are migrating into the United States today. This has especially been magnified by the current presidential administration.

—— As in Germany, there is an urgency to speak urgency to reflect on immigration now due to the reality of global migration generally and the migration of people from Central America in particular. The issue of social cohesion is one that undergirds much of the conversation in the US, though many would not state this overtly. As the US becomes more and more diverse and the trajectory towards those who are white losing their majority status in the US there is an energy of retrenchment that seeks to reassert a kind of a white norm in the culture at large. Of

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course, there is little consensus about what such a norm actually looks like. More often it is described in terms of what it is not (aka...we are not like “those” people). Of course, thinking along these lines is on a spectrum from full acceptance of others to a much more “right wing” approach that would wish all these “other” people would go back to the places from which they have come. One might wonder if this is not so very different from what has been observed in Germany?

The Bible as a witness to migration and wandering

——— The summary of the essential and normative experience of migration throughout the Bible was insightful and helpful, indeed. This recounting suggests that migration is not only a frequent experience of people in the Biblical texts but also suggests that migration is an essential quality of human development. While such migration is often times not chosen, it is out of such experience that the presence of God is often newly discovered as a presence of creative empowerment, even (and maybe especially) in times of exile and great stress. Such experience can have the effect of deepening individuals and communities in their sense of God’s leading.

——— On more than one occasion conversations with recent immigrants have surfaced this kind of story of newly discovered strength when it seemed that all was futile. That said, there are also many stories where migration has been met with resistance and violence. This is certainly part of the experience of folks who are attempting to cross the southern border of the US.

——— In the wider conversation about migration in the United States, there are those who know well the call of God in scripture to care for the widow, the orphan and the immigrant. However, there are many who call themselves Christian who seem to know little of this call. It is incumbent on our pastors and churches to foster deep Bible study in such a way that people

~~can become so familiar with this call that it becomes more and more a part of the narrative of the wider culture all the way to those who form public policy. This is urgent and long work.~~
