

God's People: A People on the Move...
A resource for churches in solidarity with uprooted people

Fact Sheet # 10:

Strangers no longer

Much faith based reflection on the theme of refugees and migration focuses on the Biblical call to “welcome the stranger.” The stranger, by definition, is outside our community, set apart by different beliefs, customs, and ways of speaking. Often the stranger inspires fear. The Biblical call to welcome the stranger invites us to go beyond our mistrust and suspicion in order to welcome newcomers into our community.



Illustration: Rini Templeton

But what happens when the stranger in our midst remains forever a stranger? People of colour, both new immigrants and Canadian born, are too often treated as if they don't belong. They face systemic barriers in accessing employment, housing and social services. They find themselves forever labeled as “immigrant” rather than Canadian. Even citizenship represents no more than a fragile hold on belonging. Mahar Arar, the Syrian-born Canadian deported to Syria on false allegations of terrorism, discovered that the rights of “strangers” are easily suspended in the name of national security.

Don't call me a stranger

Don't call me a stranger;
I need to feel at home;
Especially when loneliness cools my heart.

Don't call me a stranger;
The soil we step on is the same;
But mine is not “the promised land”

Don't call me a stranger;
The color of my passport is different;
But the color of our blood is the same;

Don't call me a stranger;
The language I speak sounds different,
But the feelings it expresses are the same.

Don't call me a stranger;
I toil and struggle in your land;
And the sweat of our brows is the same.

Don't call me a stranger;
Borders, we created them;
And the separation that results is the same.

Don't call me a stranger;
I am just your friend;
But you do not know me yet.

Don't call me a stranger;
We cry for justice and peace in different ways
But our God is the same.

Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus,
Philippines, 1995 (Abridged version)

The Bible clearly speaks against this kind of discrimination. In Leviticus, we read: “The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you” (Lev 19: 34). When we recognize the stranger as fellow citizen, then their well being is no longer seen as a matter of charity, but as a matter of rights and entitlement.

In order to truly welcome the stranger, we must recognize the stranger as one of us. The borders and barriers between “us” and “them” are merely human constructions that serve to justify exploitation and violence. The truth is that we are sisters and brothers, one people under God. Paul writes to the Ephesians: “So God came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near... So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (Eph 2: 17,19).

Demographically, this is already true – migrants are not far off strangers but rather our neighbours. May it also be true in our hearts and in our practice, as we relate to migrants as full members of our communities.

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Migrant Sunday Liturgy

Call to Worship

Leader: Peace to you who are far off

All: **Peace to you who are near**

Leader: Peace to the migrant

All: **Peace to the native born**

Leader: We are no longer strangers

All: **We are members of one body
one church, one household of God**

Prayer of Approach

O God,
Open our eyes to see the needs of migrants
Open our ears to hear their cries for justice
Open our hearts to assist sojourners near and far

Show us where love, faith and hope are needed
Use us as ministers of your healing

Let us not be afraid to defend the weak
because of the anger of the strong,
Nor afraid to defend the poor
because of the anger of the rich

Sustain us in the coming days that we may be able
to do some work of peace for thee. Amen

*United Methodist Committee on Relief
(based on a prayer from South Africa)*

Hymn: For the healing of the nations

Prayer of Confession

Why, O God,
do our neighbours have to exhaust their strength
to come work in our fields, care for our children,
and build our homes?

Why, O God,
do we ask the most vulnerable to endure the
hardship and abuses of work we will not do
ourselves?

Why, O God,
do we allow the pursuit of profits
to outweigh our sense of fairness?

O God, have mercy on us.

Based on a prayer from National farm worker ministry, US.

Readings

Leviticus 19: 1-2, 9, 33-34

Ephesians 2:14-22

Matthew 25: 31-35

Sermon: No longer strangers

Use the reflection on the reverse of this fact sheet
as a starting point for a sermon about welcoming
migrants as full members of our communities.

Prayer of Intercession

Jesus, full of love and mercy, watch over our sister
and brother migrants. Have compassion and protect
them as they suffer mistreatment and humiliation
along their way, as they encounter distrust and
marginalization. Touch with your goodness the
hearts of all those who see them pass by. Help us
to respect them and treat them with dignity.

Take care of their families until they return home.
Grant them the grace to return safely, not with
broken hearts but with their hopes fulfilled.

*Prayer on the wall of the Community Centre for Migrants in Altar,
Mexico*

Hymn: In Christ there is no East or West

Offering

As we present our offerings, we also offer ourselves
to the work of justice for migrants everywhere. We
remember the words of Mexican-American migrant
rights activist Cesar Chavez:

"What do we want the church to do? We ask for its
presence with us, beside us, as Christ among us.
We ask the church to sacrifice with the people for
social change, for justice and for love of brother and
sister. We don't ask for words. We ask for deeds."

Hymn: What does the Lord require?

Sending:

Loving God, as you send us into the world you love
to build our futures together, give us grace to go
thankfully and with courage in the power of your
Spirit. Amen

National Council of Churches in Australia