

Advocacy

Putting love of neighbor into action

Moses said to the Lord, "See, you have said to me, Bring up this people. Consider too that this nation is your people." He said to God, "If your presence will not go, do not carry us up from here." The Lord said to Moses, "I will do the very thing that you have asked."
Exodus 33:12a, 13b, 15, and 17.

Information:

Non-profit organizations and faith based groups across the country help organize efforts to bring about change in US immigration laws, offer direct services to immigrants, and provide resources for individuals to undergird their efforts. Immigration is a national issue and requires the support and actions of people everywhere in order to be effective.

Insight:

While mission work is often synonymous with trips to foreign countries, one does not have to look far from the church building to see foreign nationals. Often at the margins in American society, immigrants come to pursue the American Dream but find few doors open to them. Mission work can happen without ever needing a passport and since many immigrants support families in their home countries. By advocating for immigrants, it is possible to impact the situation in their home country as well.

Invitation to Act:

Mission projects can be active hands on activities or more meditative ways to assist immigrants through prayer and letter writing. Below are some examples and resources for those getting started. However, an important first step is to get to know the immigrants in and around the local community to learn how to best support them and their contributions to the community.

Advocating within the legislative system is critical. Visits to the offices of elected officials, letter writing campaigns, and letters to the editor of local newspapers are all great ways to show support and concern for immigrants who

are a vital part of the labor force. Interfaith Worker Justice (www.iwj.org) offers resources on how to form an Immigration Delegation to support these advocacy efforts.

Begin an immigrant task force that brings together people of faith, non-profit leaders, and business owners to create share information. The Office of Immigration Issues at PC(USA) has created materials to assist in the development of the task force as well as its first steps. Contact the office at dana.dages@pcusa.org to request a packet.

Visit immigrant detainees who are housed at detention centers. Discover where immigrants are being detained near your area, then work with the detention center to offer pastoral or spiritual care to those in detention through visitation. Donate items that immigration detainees need yet may not have access to while imprisoned.



For example one congregation found out that female detainees were forced to wear men's orange boxer shorts instead of women's underwear and held a Panty Drive. After collecting hundreds of cotton underwear, they traveled to the detention center to deliver the gifts, where a shared meal was planned. Other ideas include letter writing materials, phone cards, and information on free legal services in the community.

Coordinate services for immigrants in the local community including English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, homework tutoring for children, citizenship classes, or other services identified as a need.

Educate the community and congregation on issues of immigration. Invite experts to speak about the reality of the US immigration system to learn the reality of coming to America. Work with advocates to share the stories of immigrants and what programs they offer to the community. Be aware of the contributions immigrants make to the local community and invite them to come and talk about their work. Consider taking a mission trip to the US/Mexico border to learn about the people who come to the US. Contact Presbyterian Border Ministries at www.presbyterianborderministry.org or 210-299-5011, for information on scheduling a trip.

Encourage an existing book or movie club to engage with materials about the immigrant experience. The Office of Immigration Issues at PC(USA) has resources available including both documentaries and films about immigrants as well as a list of printed resources.

Contact the office at dana.dages@pcusa.org for a list of resources.

Inquire:

All people need an advocate and while Jesus is our advocate before God, Christians are called to advocate for the stranger – those in most need of justice. The Bible is full of stories of individuals advocating on behalf of others. Moses advocated for the people of Israel after the incident with the Golden Calf and pleaded that God accompany them into the Promised Land. The story continues with God re-establishing the covenant with the people of Israel and being present with them in the desert. Join in pray to ask for God's guidance and presence in our advocating for God's people.

God of justice and mercy, thank you for the stories of our ancestors. Through them may we learn from their faith, their love of neighbor, and their courage in standing up for what is just and fair even to you. God it is often difficult to use our voices and utter the words, "thus saith the Lord", but that is what you call us to do. As Jesus was our greatest prophet showing us that all we do for the least of these, we do for him, we ask that we see Christ in and among our neighbors. God send the Holy Spirit to stir within us and led us to our vocation as advocates. In Christ. Amen.

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