



Peaceful Practices conversation guide

To be used in conjunction with the *Peaceful Practices* curriculum at mcc.org/peaceful-practices for congregations to dialogue on sensitive topics.¹



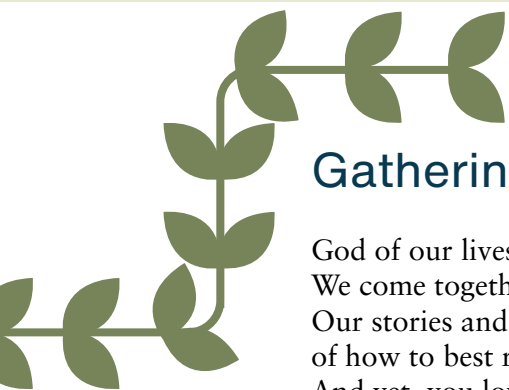
Immigration: A theological question?

Immigration conversation guide, part 1

Overview

This guide is intended to help facilitate healthy conversation while addressing the delicate aspects of this topic. Facilitators should keep in mind the following steps as they set up the conversation.

- Begin in **prayer**, together as a group.
- Go over the **Peaceful Practices**, which will help set the tone for the conversation. Make sure everyone can agree to engaging in the conversation while embodying these Peaceful Practices.
- Read through the content **Introduction** with everyone. This will help center the group around a shared language.
- Dive into the **Conversation café** in three rounds of sharing for 20 minutes each with small groups. See café set up instructions at the bottom of this conversation guide. When finished, open a brief plenary session for anyone to share highlights of their conversations with the larger group.
- End with the **Closing blessing**.



Gathering prayer

God of our lives,
We come together in your name, across spaces of difference.
Our stories and experiences often take us to different outcomes
of how to best represent your love in the world.
And yet, you love us each fiercely, and call us together.
Following Jesus' example, we seek a posture of openness and dialogue,
willing to listen deeply and learn from one another.
Bless us with the gifts of patience, kindness, humility and understanding.
May the power of your Holy Spirit draw us together,
moving us towards the humanity of one another,
rather than away from the opinions of the other.
We pray together in the name of
God our creator, Christ our reconciler and the Holy Spirit our comforter,
Amen.



Peaceful Practices

Curiosity. Be curious, inviting diversity of ideas and opinions.

Discovery. Focus on what matters.

Engagement. Invite the best in yourself and others.

Dialogue. Listen together for insights and deeper questions.

Empathy. Seek to understand rather than persuade.

Authenticity. Speak from the heart, contributing your own thinking and experience.

Dignity. Consider power dynamics.

Transformation. Welcome creativity.



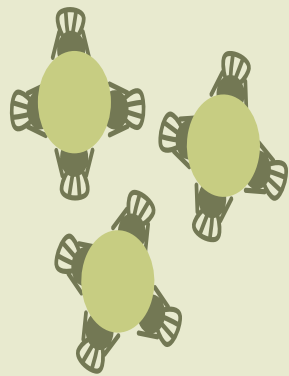
Introduction

The intersection of hospitality and migration is deeply theological. For millennia, the people of God have migrated, at times welcoming strangers in their midst and at other times rejecting strangers. They also made laws to determine who is welcome in their community. Throughout the Bible, God shows up as a stranger to visit people. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew people were strangers themselves. Their experience as slaves, foreigners and displaced people was central to God's mandate to extend hospitality (Deuteronomy 10:18-19). Even with this mandate, however, after they were freed of their bondage, they built walls around the temple to protect themselves and keep others out (1 Kings 6).

The balance between welcome and protection has continued from biblical times to the current day. In the U.S. today, Christians have a wide range of opinions on and responses to immigration. For some, the repeated call throughout the Old and New Testaments to “show hospitality to strangers” (Hebrews 13:2) invites an unconditional welcome to any person in their midst, especially those who are most vulnerable. For others, the instruction that “everyone be subject to the governing authorities” (Romans 13:1) provides an important framework to approach the issue of immigration in the U.S. Some perspectives argue that hospitality should be contextualized and weighed alongside concerns about safety and economic prosperity.

Much of this conversation comes down to how we read the Bible and its mandate of hospitality.

Conversation café instructions²



Arrange small tables around the room, with four chairs to a table. Include snacks and doodling materials to help create a relaxed and invitational atmosphere. Place *Peaceful Practices* table tents ([found here](#)) at each table to use as guidelines for engaging with one another. Invite participants to start at any table. Each small group should identify a person (called a table host) who will remain at the table for the duration of the dialogue. Initiate the first round of conversation with the “Personal experience” questions. Table hosts should invite everyone at the table to go around and respond to the question(s) as they wish, passing if they prefer. Questions

are meant to spark conversation and do not all need to be addressed; use them as general guides. After everyone at the table has had a chance to speak, table hosts may open the conversation for impromptu dialogue. Invite participants to find new table groups for round 2, follow the same process and reflect on the “Exploring the topic” questions. Do this again for round 3 and use the “Reflecting on the conversation” questions. When the three rounds of table conversations are finished, open to the large group and ask for any reflections.

This resource is designed for in person conversation. Dialogue across significant difference of opinion and belief is hard. Creating an invitational space is important and pieces such as doodling materials, food and body language are challenging to replicate online. For groups that are unable to gather in person for dialogue, we recommend thinking creatively and intentionally to set up the best virtual conversation possible.

Conversation café

Personal experience

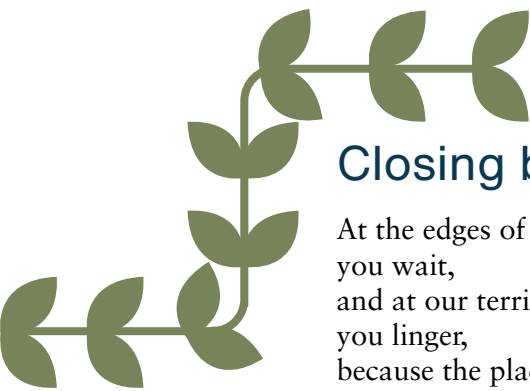
- What biblical stories do you connect with themes of migration, hospitality, authority of government, safety and economic prosperity?
- Which character do you identify with when you think of stories of migration in the Bible? How does this influence your understanding and experience of migration and hospitality?
- What role does language play in this conversation about migration and hospitality? For example, what language do you use to describe people on the move in biblical times? What about in U.S. history, or current day?

Exploring the topic

- What Anabaptist or other Christian values underlie your foundational beliefs about immigration, migration, protection, legality, hospitality, etc.?
- Is the role of the church different from the role of the government on issues of immigration? How can the church authentically live into its call?
- What does faithful hospitality look like in today's context of migration? Is the biblical mandate of hospitality meant for a future reality, in heaven, or an instruction for Christians to bring about the kingdom of God on earth, today?

Reflecting on the conversation

- Who is your stranger? Who are you a stranger to? How has your own identity and Other's identity been nuanced in your mind, your understanding, through this conversation?
- How has hearing other people's stories and perspectives shaped your understanding of the topic?
- How are you being drawn to continue the conversation?



Closing blessing: At the Edges of Our Borders³

At the edges of our borders
you wait,
and at our territorial lines
you linger,
because the place where
we touch
beyond our boundaries
is where you take
your delight.

And when we learn to read
the landscape of our fears,
and when we come to know
the terrain of every sorrow,
then will we turn
our fences into bridges
and our borders
into paths of peace.

Follow-up

- Give us feedback! Please fill out [this survey](#) after you have engaged this conversation guide.
- Join our mailing list and learn more by signing up to our [Peace & Justice Journal](#).
- [Donate](#).





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May 2024.

Endnotes

1. MCC's conversation guides do not reflect a specific theological or ideological stance of the organization, but rather provide guidance for how groups of different perspectives might have a healthy conversation together.

2 For more reading on the World Café method, see <http://www.theworldcafe.com/key-concepts-resources/world-cafe-method/>.

3 “At the Edges of Our Borders” © Jan Richardson from *Night Visions: Searching the Shadows of Advent and Christmas*. Used by permission. janrichardson.com.