



Peaceful Practices conversation guide

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



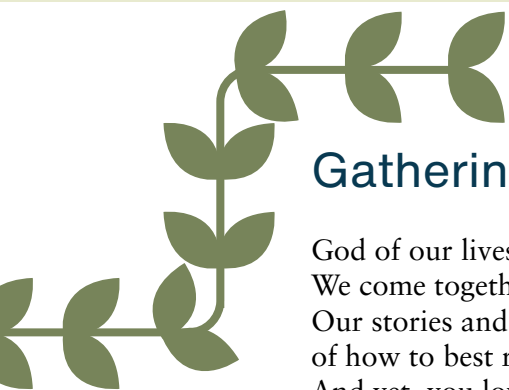
Immigration: A broken system?

Immigration conversation guide, part 2

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.

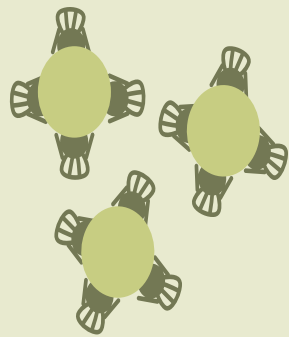


Introduction

Migration is a natural, human behavior that has happened around the world since the beginning of creation. Individuals and groups of people migrate for all kinds of reasons—in search of physical safety, agricultural and economic opportunity, political and religious freedom, to reunite with family, forced removal, displacement and more.

For more than a century, legislators in the U.S. have struggled to create a functional system of immigration by making laws that define who is allowed to migrate to the country and who is not. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 marks the first significant law restricting immigration into the U.S., as it banned certain nationalities and created new requirements for entry. Since then, policies have ebbed and flowed, at times restricting migration while at other times creating paths of welcome and opportunity. This has resulted in a very fractured and complex system.

Since the 1970s, U.S. presidents and legislators across the political spectrum have claimed that the U.S. immigration system is broken, a sentiment that resonates with many. But what does “broken” mean? While many agree that the system is not working, the conversation about immigration policy can be polarizing and has splintered our nation, communities, faith groups and even families. Some believe that borders are too open, allowing for an unreasonable amount of people to enter the U.S. and depleting resources reserved for citizens. Others advocate that there is insufficient access for foreigners to enter the U.S. and believe the policies currently set in place are restrictive and harmful. Individual opinions on how open or closed our borders should be range across the political spectrum, influenced by economics, theology, personal experience and more.



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

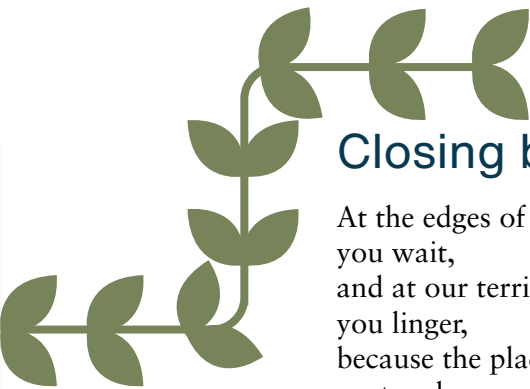
- Where is home for you? Has it changed—how and why? If not, why not?
- How do you understand the *American Dream*?
- Share a time when you felt excluded or had to overcome a barrier in your life. Alternatively, share a time when you felt protected by a barrier.

Exploring the topic

- What does a *broken* immigration system mean to you?
- What concerns and hopes underlie your perception of what makes the current system “broken”?
- What factors do you believe should qualify or disqualify someone from being able to enter the U.S.? Do these qualifications vary in different circumstances? (*To see an overview of how the immigration system currently works in the U.S. and established options for people to enter, see americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/how- united-states-immigration-system-works.*)

Reflecting on the conversation

- What did you hear that was new today? How has hearing other people’s stories and perspectives shaped your understanding of the topic?
- Where do you see inconsistencies or nuances in your own perspective?
- As you listened together, where did you see overlap in underlying beliefs, values, feelings and needs?



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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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.