

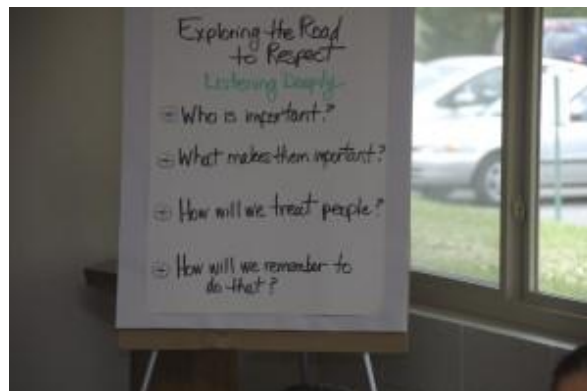
## Changing Ourselves: Theological Reflection for All Ages

By Nancy Heege

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Immigration justice work is complex. We Unitarian Universalists sometimes think that we have the solutions to complex problems, that we know how to make things right. But our belief in a free and responsible search for truth and meaning implies that there is always more we can learn and additional layers of meaning to uncover. Can we find a multigenerational approach to justice work that focuses not just on solutions to complex problems, but also gives us opportunities to reflect on, and be affected by, the work we do? As we do justice work in our congregations, we need to help one another keep open hearts and be willing to be changed by what we learn, what we see, and what we experience.

It's not sufficient to study the facts of the issue. Facts engage our minds, but that's only a part of the picture. It's not sufficient to tell the stories of those who come to this country and then struggle with the language, underemployment, access to housing and education for their children, prejudice. Stories engage our emotions, but that's only part of the picture. In our congregations, we must engage in theological reflection to engage our hearts.



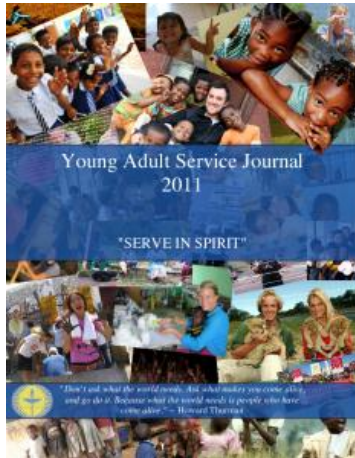
Are children and youth capable of doing theological reflection? I think so. In 2003, the Institute for American Values published a report by the Commission on Children at Risk. The report said: "... a less definitive but still significant body of evidence suggests that we are hardwired for meaning, born with a built-in capacity and drive to search for purpose and reflect on life's ultimate ends." The report suggested that an answer to this crisis of children at risk might be found in "authoritative communities...groups of people who are committed to one another over time and who model and pass on at least part of what it means to be a good person and live a good life." Our churches and families can be authoritative communities, offering people of all ages opportunities to reflect together on issues of meaning and purpose, including immigration justice. Here are some ways to get started.

### Theological Reflection with Children

Many of our forbears came or were brought to the United States from somewhere else, including those who came here thousands of years ago. Talk with children about how family migration

stories help us to understand contemporary migration or immigration stories. Ask: how recent is your family's migration or immigration experience? Do you know which countries or regions your family members came from, why they left their homes and what challenges they faced when they arrived here? Share both the uplifting stories and the heartbreaking ones in the family and in the congregation. Share artifacts and customs from those who migrated or immigrated here.

### Theological Reflection with Youth and Young Adults



The [Young Adult Service Journal](#) includes questions for young adults to reflect on before, during, and after a service trip in order to deepen the experience. These theological reflection questions could be used by anyone, high school age or older, venturing into justice making work. In addition, people of all ages might wish to explore the reflection questions and spiritual exercises in Try This at Home and Commit Yourself. Thanks to Erik Mohn for these resources!

Wendell Berry wrote:

We can start from where we are, with what we have, and imagine and work for the healings that are necessary. But we must begin by giving up any idea that we can bring about these healings without fundamental changes in the way we think and live. We face a choice that is starkly simple: we must change or be changed. If we fail to change for the better, then we will be changed for the worse.

How is your congregation helping children, youth, adults and families commit to changing themselves for the better as they engage with immigration justice work? What theological questions are you asking as you act to change the world for the better?



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