

Discussion Guide for Unitarian Universalist Groups and Congregations

United States Immigration: Theological Reflection and Discussion

This collection includes 22 brief excerpts from sermons and writings about the topic of immigration offered for Unitarian Universalist congregations. All are excerpted and presented with permission of the author. Each excerpt is followed by questions for discussion. The excerpts and discussion questions are suitable for in-person discussion groups and theological reflection groups, as well as for on-line discussion and individual reflection and journaling to help Unitarian Universalists prepare to engage in immigration justice work as an expression of their faith.

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Spiritual and Theological Grounding for Immigration Justice Work

“Immigration,” Rev. Peter Morales, President of the Unitarian Universalist Association, at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Phoenix, AZ, May 30, 2010

In Phoenix to protest the controversial Arizona immigration law SB 1070, Rev. Peter Morales summarizes the long history of impact /devastation United States policies and actions have had on Mexicans, African Americans, and Native Americans. He sets a compelling stage for his assertion that legal issues are not the topic when it comes to immigration: moral issues are.

So I ask you today, who has a moral right to be here? Oh, it is easy to determine who has a legal right to be here. But what about a moral right? Why is it all right if a wealthy family from New York retires to Arizona, but not all right if a poor family from Chiapas comes here seeking work?

And here I must speak about the issue of some people being “legal” and others being “illegal.” As a religious people who affirm human compassion, who advocate for human rights, who seek justice, we must never, never make the mistake of confusing a legal right with a moral right. The forced removal of Native Americans from their land and onto reservations was legal. The importation and sale of African slaves was legal. Later on, in my lifetime, we had laws across the south designed to prevent African American citizens from voting. Apartheid was legal in South Africa. The confiscation of the property of Jews at the beginning of the Nazi regime was legal. The Spanish Inquisition was legal. Crucifying Jesus was legal. Burning Michael Servetus at the stake for his unitarian theology was legal. The fact that something is legal does not cut much ethical ice. The powerful have always used the legal system to oppress the powerless.

Yes, as citizens we should respect the rule of law. But more importantly, our duty is to create laws that are founded on our highest sense of justice, equity, and compassion. As Unitarian Universalists, we have a long and proud tradition of opposing unjust laws. One of our martyrs, the Rev. James Reeb, died while protesting Jim Crow laws in Alabama.

We have before us some fundamental choices. There are loud voices that urge us to choose fear, denial, reactionary nationalism, and racism. We must resist. That path leads to division, hatred, violence and death.

There is a better way. It is way that is urged upon us by our UU Principles and by every major religious tradition. We must choose the path of compassion, hope, and human dignity. We must choose a path that is founded on the recognition that we are all connected, that we are all in this together.

We don't need fences. The last thing we need today is more barriers that divide us. We need bridges. We need understanding and cooperation.

Discussion Questions

- If we had the ability, in hindsight, to reorient the Western legal system to a system based on the Unitarian Universalist Principles, what would the world look like? What would the United States look like?
- Rev. Morales draws a clear distinction between what is legal and what is moral. How do UU congregations and individuals serve humanity in the face of unjust, immoral laws?

“My Time in the Maricopa County Jail,” Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray, Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Phoenix, AZ, August 8, 2010

While arrested and imprisoned in the Fourth Avenue Jail, Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray witnessed racial harassment and physical abuse first hand. Here she describes her thoughts as she prepared herself to take part in an act of civil disobedience.

On the day before the actions, just before I was to welcome more than 100 Unitarian Universalists who had gathered here in our sanctuary to be a part of the events on [July] 29th, I took a little time to go out into our memorial garden and center myself. Outside, behind the sanctuary in our memorial garden is a statuary of four women called “That Which Might Have Been.” These statues, by the artist John Henry Waddell, a member of our congregation, are a memorial to the four young girls killed at the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. The bomb was set off by members of the Ku Klux Klan in September 1963 (forty-seven years ago next month), during the middle of the civil rights movement. Overwhelmed by that tragedy, Waddell was moved to begin work on the memorial, which was completed the following year.

I have sat in our garden many times, but the statues held particular power and meaning on that day before July 29th. I was sitting nearest that statue of the woman that faces North, who stands powerfully with her hand raised up to the sky. Each of the statues represents something different, and Waddell has said the North facing statue stands for the power of hope and prayer. Sitting before the statues I was reminded of earlier days in our country, when the majority in our country let fear convince them that somehow their lives and values were at stake and could be lost by allowing another person to share in the opportunity and equal rights that our country so prides itself on. That fear, and the hate that it fueled, led to the murder of those young girls. Sitting before that statue, it all came home, that today, it is the children who are carrying the scars, it is the children who are being most damaged by those who beat the drums of fear in our state and in our country, and who legislate out of that fear.

When we legislate out of fear, we do not get solutions, we only invite abuse, anger, and frustration—on all sides.

Discussion Questions

- Reflect on the feelings you experience when you think about the Jim Crow era, segregation, and discrimination in the United States. Are some of those feelings similar to or the same as what is evoked in you when you reflect on immigration justice issues in the United States today?
- If you were to create a sculpture to represent your feelings regarding the issues of immigration and immigrants or migrants in our country today, what would it look like? If you were to create a sculpture representing immigration to the United States 100 years ago, what would it look like? How about 300 years ago? How about 10,000 years ago at the end of the last ice age? Sketch or describe them. Spend time comparing and contrasting the feelings, emotions, and symbols you would choose to represent the different time periods.
- Why do you think Rev. Frederick-Gray says, “it is the children who are carrying the scars, it is the children who are being most damaged by those who beat the drums of fear in our state and in our country, and who legislate out of that fear”? Try to reach beyond the obvious answer to parse out the systemic damage done not only to immigrant children, or to children of color, or to white children or dominant culture children, but to ALL children. What could your congregation do to help protect children from fear?”

“Safe and Profoundly Unsound,” Rev. Victoria Safford, White Bear Unitarian Universalist Church, Mahtomedi, MN, January 13, 2008

Rev. Victoria Safford points out that current immigration laws are a form of creeping repression that threatens our democracy. She calls on Unitarian Universalists to uphold their historic ideals: “We are believers in the responsibility of everyone, of all of us, each of us, no matter how frightened we are in these frightening times, to be something other than afraid.”

One of the assumptions with which I struggle always is the notion that I can be a citizen without being a vigilant patriot, that because I’m unlikely to be deported or detained offshore, I can leave the hard questions and the hard work to someone else, subcontracting out my share of the work of democracy. But I know this is not true.

We come from a long line of heretics who have professed many beliefs—blasphemous and orthodox—about all kinds of things, both sacred and profane. The freedom to speak, whatever the speech; the freedom to believe, whatever the belief, is the heart of the matter for us. In centuries past Unitarians and Universalists were burned at the stake, they were tortured in dungeons, their books were burned, their churches destroyed, their livelihoods ruined for holding to their truths, for refusing to recant, refusing to comply with governments, or bishops, or mobs. In defense of the free mind, heart, spirit, soul, community, they died in Prague, Geneva, Krakow, London, Dachau, Selma. . . .

We come from a long line of dissenters and dissidents who died for this faith—and from others who survived, like the ones who wrote that organizing statement in New England, “Respecting in each other and in all the right of intellect and conscience to be free, we set up no theological conditions of membership”: no ID cards, no pledge of allegiance to any creed, no fences for the spirit. “And recognizing the brotherhood of the human race,” they wrote, “and the equality of human rights, we make no distinction as to the conditions and rights of membership in this society, on account of sex, or color, or nationality.” That was written in 1863, at the height of the Civil War, and though that particular church was in the north, not everyone in the neighborhood was prepared to go that far. *Most* citizens and congregations were not prepared to go that far, especially when it was not yet clear which side would win the war. To the Unitarians, that didn’t matter: the congregation welcomed slaves, women, heretics, and true believers, anyone who had “an honest aim” to make the search for truth the rule of life. What mattered was freedom and conscience.

How far do we need to be prepared to go? What matters now, to us, the descendants and inheritors of such a noble legacy?

Discussion Questions

- Can one be a “citizen” without being a “patriot”? How would you define either of those words? Think about this question especially with the knowledge that when someone becomes a naturalized citizen they must pass a test to prove they understand what being a citizen of the United States means and they must be willing to serve to defend the country.
- Using Rev. Safford’s own questions: What matters now, to us, the descendants and inheritors of such a noble [Unitarian Universalist] legacy? How far do we need to be prepared to go [to ensure an inclusive society]?

“Building Bridges,” Rev. Tracy Sprowls-Jenks, First Unitarian Society of Plainfield, NJ, August 29, 2010

Rev. Tracy Sprowls-Jenks evokes the Good Samaritan to remind Unitarian Universalists that looking beyond a person’s religion and nationality to find our common humanity is a religious idea. Rev. Sprowls-Jenks challenges Unitarian Universalists to live religious lives that reach beyond tolerance to love.

Sometimes extraordinary things happen when we allow ourselves to cross boundaries. Extraordinary things can happen when the fear is moved aside and we open ourselves to the possibility of mutual understanding and respect, even though we are of different cultures or faiths. Gustav Neibuhr, a journalist who comes from a long line of ministers and theologians, tells us this from his book *Beyond Tolerance*. Some three years after Martin Luther King, Jr., wrote his letter from the Birmingham jail, he met the Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh. Both found common ground in their commitment to nonviolence. In his sermon at Riverside church in New York City in April of 1967, King quoted Vietnamese Buddhist monks and called for placing love of neighbor above all—before nation, before tribe, before race. Martin Luther King Jr. said, “When I speak of love I am not speaking of some sentimental and weak response ... I am speaking of that force which all great religions have seen as the supreme unifying principle of life. Love is somehow the key that unlocks the door which leads to ultimate reality.” He went on to describe this love as a Hindu-Muslim-Christian-Jewish-Buddhist belief. Love was not held solely by one group but transcended every single group.

If we look at the sign outside our building, it reads, “Standing on the Side of Love.” That is our calling, our challenge, our theological ground on which we are invited to place ourselves on all issues. Love roots us in our faith and in our community and in all the relationships we know and can forge through our reaching out across the boundaries of religion, of difference, to the new relationships we can develop. It is not a sentimental or easy love. It is love of neighbor, it is a people-first position, it is a place of compassion. Standing on the side of love goes beyond tolerance and places us squarely in a place of mutuality and respect. And it positions us to be a religion for these times when the driving forces of politics, globalization, and fear would divide us as a people.

Discussion Questions

- Are there ways in which you fall short of fully embracing love as a value and a practice? How is “love” challenging for you?
- If we Unitarian Universalists are standing on the side of love, are there others standing on the side of hate? What language shall we use to describe those whose moral stances differ from our own? In what ways is it useful for us to set ourselves in opposition to them? In what ways is it not useful?
- What does the idea of universal love add to the conversation about how we as Unitarian Universalists respond to immigration issues?

“Institutionalized Xenophobia,” Ellen Taylor, The Quincy Unitarian Church of Quincy, IL, October 26, 2008

Ellen Taylor shares the story of her Uncle John’s struggle to help his terminally ill wife Pilar immigrate, only to be met with just-one-more-document-needed bureaucracy, which never came through before Pilar’s death. Taylor wonders how a country built on immigration has become so xenophobic, but calls to each and all of us to remember individuals are kind and good, even if governments are not.

Mom received a phone call one day from a woman in Springfield, Illinois. She said she was trying to find a person with Mom’s name who had a brother named John because she had, by mistake, received a fax containing Pilar’s medical information. The cover letter with the fax included Mom’s name. She went to the Internet to locate Mom so that the fax could be appropriately directed. She said to Mom, “I looked at this and knew that it was very important to someone, so I had to see that it got to the right place.” We have no way of knowing her views on immigration; we’ve never met her. But she knew that someone needed help and she went out of her way to provide it.

The contrast between her response and the response of those working in immigration was striking. It almost makes me sympathetic to the conservative position that only individuals, not government, should be expected to provide help to others. Can we turn immigration policy and procedures over to individuals? I don’t see how. But our government was established by people, for people. Our governmental agencies are staffed by individuals. We should expect our government agencies to operate in ways that respect the worth and dignity of every human being—citizen or non-citizen, immigrant or native-born. In fact, we shouldn’t just expect it, we should demand it. I would remind everyone that our Declaration of Independence does not say “all men are created equal as long as they’re American citizens.” And I would remind those who shout that our nation was built on biblical principle that there’s no biblical record of God instructing the Hebrews to love the aliens IF they have proper documentation. Nor is there biblical record of Jesus saying “love thy neighbor, but only if he speaks thy language.”

I urge all of you to remember Alexis de Toqueville’s words. “America is great because she is good. If America ceases to be good, she will cease to be great.”

Discussion Questions

- How can we cultivate the kindness of individual connection while, at the same time, establishing policies and procedures that apply to all?
- How can each of us embody the kind of caring that led to a stranger seeking out Ms. Taylor’s mother to pass on important information?
- Consider Ellen Taylor’s choice of the Alexis de Toqueville’s quote: “America is great because she is good. If America ceases to be good, she will cease to be great.” How do these words represent your understanding of the United States?

“Life on the Border,” Heather Nan Carpenter, First Unitarian Church of Nashville, TN, February 25, 2007

Heather Nan Carpenter sojourned with other divinity students to Mexico with a non-profit group called Borderlinks. She talks about meeting a “real-life hero” named Shanti Sellz, a volunteer with the No More Deaths program who was arrested with her colleague Daniel Strauss while transporting three migrants for medical attention.

At the time I met Shanti, she was still working with No More Deaths. The No More Deaths legal team was fighting this battle in court—their defense: IT CANNOT POSSIBLY BE ILLEGAL TO SAVE A HUMAN BEING’S LIFE. Shanti and Daniel were both 23, facing a long sentence [fifteen years], but they refused to plea out when the constitutionality of this law was so questionable.

In 1850, with the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act, many Unitarians and some Universalists were outraged by a law that similarly made it illegal for Northerners to aid escaped slaves. I know that the contexts are very different, but the same argument stands: IT CANNOT POSSIBLY BE ILLEGAL TO SAVE A HUMAN BEING’S LIFE. Theodore Parker, a Unitarian Minister in Boston, openly defied the Fugitive Slave Act when hosting a couple, Ellen and William Craft, in his own home. He got wind of “kidnappers,” as they called them, in town, bounty hunters from the South looking for the Crafts. He wrote his sermon with his revolver at his desk, ready to defend his guests. It is rumored that he was even armed in the pulpit that Sunday morning. The kidnappers were run out of town, with Parker at the front of the throng, warning the two men that as a clergyman he could only protect them so long before the mob took their justice, so it was best to get gone (though of course, he was one of the ring-leaders of that very same mob). After the Crafts were safely delivered further north, Parker wrote a letter to President Fillmore, telling him of the escape of the Crafts and his part in it. He challenged the President to “enforce his monstrous law” and arrest him. He wasn’t arrested, but he did go on to disobey the Fugitive Slave Act in both overt and hidden ways.

A 1995 Unitarian Universalist [General Assembly] [Resolution of Immediate Witness](#) implores individual Unitarian Universalists to “serve those directly harmed and others affected by the passage of any legislation which would deny human beings the basic services warranted to all members of a free and just society.” Theodore Parker’s example serves us well in our own trying times.

Discussion Questions

- How do you feel when you hear the story of Theodore Parker? How does “his example serve us well in our own trying times,” to use Carpenter’s words?
- “IT CANNOT POSSIBLY BE ILLEGAL TO SAVE A HUMAN BEING’S LIFE.” What do you think? Is that true? To what extent are you willing to take this idea?

“Immigration as a Moral Issue,” Rev. Susan Karlson, Unitarian Church of Staten Island, NY, September 18, 2011

Rev. Susan Karlson challenges herself to know the story of the vilified “other,” the one and many who, in her justice system, stand against love. She reminds herself that her faith and the right of moral law demand that she work against a dehumanizing system, not scapegoat those within it as “others.”

When I feel “different,” I just want to escape those feelings, to turn my back on those other people whom I perceive are rejecting me. In turn, to ward off the pain, *I reject them*. This is a pattern our psyches take that is difficult to see in action. I try not to enact this pattern but sometimes my fears get the best of me.

Unitarian Universalists often take some pride in being open, inclusive, and welcoming. But perhaps that makes it more difficult for us to realize that we, too, make people into “the other.” In the case of immigration, we know who the “bad guys” are, don’t we? Well, sometimes, we make assumptions. It’s the conservative politicians who oppose justice and equity. It’s the border patrol agents who pour out the water bottles left for parched souls or the ones who hunt each immigrant crossing the desert, pregnant, sick, dying of thirst. It’s the ICE officials or the immigration officials. Maybe, our image of them is that they have no mercy or compassion in their hearts at all.

Though Unitarian Universalism calls us to see the inherent worth and dignity of every person, it’s *easy* to vilify people who can be seen as standing on the side *opposing* love. Yet it is not “others” who are doing this—it is the *immigration system* that is in sore need of repair.

In *Death of Josseline: Immigration Stories from the Arizona-Mexico Borderlands* [by Margaret Regan (Beacon Press, 2010)] are stories of those that cry out to us for justice and the stories of those doling out the injustices. I ask myself as part of my spiritual practice, “Can I see the fear and the concerns that the ‘unjust’ have in their hearts? Do they fear losing a job, a way of life? Do they fear becoming ‘an other’?” I need to hear their stories, too.

There are broader moral issues—I may be conditioned to turn adversaries and opponents into an “other.” Even more, deep in my heart and soul, I believe that I am called to take the anger I feel and transform it into love and justice. When someone we love—our children, our partners, those closest to us—infuriate us, we still love them. How can we acknowledge the anger we feel and change it into something that makes our communities more harmonious, compassionate, and peaceful, less violent?

Discussion Questions

- Are there those you consider “other” because you disagree profoundly with their stance on a moral issue? Is there a path open for you to consider those people not “other,” but one with you?
- Consider a time you were very angry with someone you love. How did you differentiate your anger from your love? How were your anger and love related to each other? How could you apply the feelings you had for your loved one to feelings you could cultivate for those you perceive as “other”?
- How can we prevent disagreements with others from distracting us from the work of building beloved community together? How can we disagree in love?

Perspectives on Arrest for Acts of Civil Disobedience

“Immigration and Indigenous Theology,” Rev. Colin Bossen, Unitarian Universalist Society of Cleveland, OH, excerpted from an article published in *Sightings*, Feb. 10, 2010, a publication of the University of Chicago, Divinity School

Rev. Colin Bossen was arrested as a result of an action of civil disobedience. Citing the theology of fellow Maricopa County jail mate Tupac Enrique Acosta, Rev. Bossen sets U.S. anti-immigration policies firmly within a Western (white and Christian) history of systemic oppression. He shares Acosta’s view that today’s terrible situation is the logical conclusion of the Doctrine of Discovery.

I did not go to jail expecting to meet a theologian. But jail was where I met Tupac Enrique Acosta. Tupac, like me, was arrested in front of one of the Maricopa County Sheriff’s offices for protesting against Arizona’s anti-immigrant law SB1070 on July 29, 2010. Unlike me, Tupac had an analysis of the bill’s place in history that put it firmly within the context of the ongoing repression of the indigenous peoples of North America.

In Tupac’s view the history of SB1070 does not begin in 2010. It begins in 1492 with Christopher Columbus’s arrival in the Western Hemisphere. Columbus’s “discovery” of the Americas prompted European political and religious leaders to develop what indigenous activists refer to as the “Christian Doctrine of Discovery.” This is the belief that because the lands of the Western Hemisphere were without Christians prior to 1492 they were free for the taking upon “discovery.” For activists like Tupac, the issues at stake in SB1070 are not so much political as theological.

As we sat together in jail Tupac traced the history of the Christian Doctrine of Discovery from its origin to its often unacknowledged presence in contemporary debates about immigration. He suggested that the doctrine was first articulated in Pope Alexander VI’s 1493 Papal Bull “Inter Caetera” and the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas between Spain and Portugal. Together these documents created a theological and legal framework that justified the expropriation and division of indigenous lands by Spain and Portugal.

In the view of Tupac and many indigenous legal scholars the framework created to facilitate the seizure of indigenous lands continues to form the core of much of federal property law today. This is particularly true as it relates to indigenous property claims. The indigenous legal scholar Steven Newcomb, for example, has found traces of the Christian Doctrine of Discovery within U.S. Supreme Court cases as recently as 2001.

Tupac believes that the principles of the Christian Doctrine of Discovery are operative in SB1070 as well. As he told me, “the purpose of SB1070 was to consolidate the perceptions of some white Americans around the idea of an America that is white in a continent that belongs to them.” In his view, SB1070 is just another attempt to assert non-indigenous dominance over the continent. After all, SB1070 is designed to enforce a border that divides not only the United States and Mexico but the indigenous peoples who belong to the Uto-Aztecan language group. They have been moving back and forth between what is now the U.S. and Mexico long before either country existed. SB1070 criminalizes their traditional freedom of movement.

Discussion Questions

- How is Tupac Enrique Acosta's argument theological? And how is it political?
- Acosta asserts that "the purpose of SB1070 was to consolidate the perceptions of some white Americans around the idea of an America that is white in a continent that belongs to them." How is his view different from that of other public figures who have commented on this law? Does his perspective change the way in which you understand the effect and intention of the law? How?
- Often in Unitarian Universalist congregations some ask to keep their church time politics-free, while others want to dive right in to politics at every opportunity. With immigration policies and U.S. attitudes surrounding undocumented workers, how can UUs navigate the arguments while staying on the higher ground of moral righteousness vs. legal mandates? How can we keep immigration a discussion of theology and not necessarily of politics? Why would we want to?

“We Who Believe in Freedom,” Rev. Greg Ward, Unitarian Universalist Church of the Monterey Peninsula, FL, August 15, 2010

Rev. Greg Ward was arrested in Arizona while protesting SB 1070, Arizona’s controversial law targeting undocumented immigrants. Subjected to the jeering, dehumanizing tactics of his jailers, feeling isolated and forgotten, he forged bonds of solidarity with his cell-mates, people with whom he had not expected to find shared hopes and dreams.

I was the last person to be arrested.

With a couple of other men, I was placed in a holding cell. Several other men, mostly Hispanic, looked up as we entered. Their eyes turned to my collar.

“They arrested a priest? Are you really a priest?”

“Yes.”

“What did you do?”

I explained. Fellow protestors chimed in. [Our Latino cellmates] seemed dumbfounded as to why a bunch of white people—from as far away as Miami—would come all this way to get arrested. Which led to a short explanation of Unitarian Universalism—which no one had ever heard of nor could quite make sense of.

Over the course of the next two hours the one steel door opened and closed. Names were shouted and people were taken away or dropped off. At times it seemed like people were moved randomly so as to purposely confuse everyone. Equally disorienting was the fact there were no clocks, no windows to the outside revealing the sun and bright neon lighting everywhere.

But one thing became surprisingly clear over the next twenty-seven hours: everyone I met in jail that day had a story.

Before this experience, I thought there was something strikingly—even inherently—different between me and people in jail. Now, I can say that the biggest general difference I observed was the color of my skin. And the number of chances our lives afforded us. Because the stories I heard were my stories. They were about the people they loved. The sense of obligation they felt to provide food and housing and a decent life for their children. The sense of desperation that led to bad choices. Their worry. Their sense of powerlessness.

After a couple of hours I got my first feeling of being forgotten—lost in the system.

In twenty-seven hours, I learned more about racism, classism, and institutionalized oppression than I learned in all my years of seminary. And I also learned more about faith, hope, and the true power of a religious community when values—and people’s lives—are on the line. We [protesters] did not change the fact that thousands of people remain trapped in that system. People trying desperately to keep their families together. People who provide most of the exploited labor force corporations of this country count on to keep their prices low. People who are, every day, arrested, detained, tried, convicted, and deported—and who have no one waiting, no one praying and no one cheering for their release. That’s why we did this.

Discussion Questions

- Some ministers suggest that a strong sermon that motivates congregants to change their behaviors would be a more valuable source of social and political change than a minister being arrested. What do you think? What was the value of Rev. Ward's arrest? What is the value of nonviolent protest that leads to arrest?
- Rev. Ward states that his Latino cellmates did not understand why he would subject himself to arrest, nor did they understand the ideologies of Unitarian Universalism even as he tried to explain. Why do you think they did not understand? In a similar situation, how would you explain Unitarian Universalism to a cellmate?

“Reflections from an Arizona Jail,” Rev. Wendy von Zirpolo, Unitarian Universalist Church of Marblehead, MA, August 15, 2010

In protest of SB 1070 Rev. von Zirpolo answered the call of activist group Puente and joined the group of nonviolent protestors blocking the jail doors in Phoenix, Arizona, as an act of civil disobedience. Determined to withstand the rigors of protest and arrest, von Zirpolo was confident that all would go smoothly and she would be free soon after her arrest. Though she bonded with the women sharing her cell, she witnessed behavior on the part of the arresting officers that tested her spirituality and made her realize her own certainty that everything would be all right stemmed from her privileged position as a white person.

I heard the screamed words: “I am not resisting arrest, I am not resisting arrest.” We saw a Latino, one of the protest’s youth leaders. Unlike the rest of us, he was not placed on the sidewalk, but instead dragged past us as he yelled these words: “I am not resisting arrest.” When we saw him again, it was clear he had been beaten. [Later, we learned of a] Latina woman being abused and suffering racial slurs during her arrest. And then having a refusal of all the other officers to tell her the name of the [offending officer.]

After what seemed an eternity, they hauled us to our feet. What followed was hours of processing. It began with the task of removing shoelaces from your shoes, while handcuffed, and observed. It included providing a urine sample, for some, while handcuffed, while observed. For everyone, it included fingerprinting, mug shots—but only after the clerical collars were removed—health histories, general harassment, a complete refusal [by police officers] to disclose what time it was, denial of medical treatment for a person in serious need of her medication, repeated interviews with the immigration officers for those of color, a physical search that left nothing, nothing untouched. I asked if I might keep my chalice, noting that it was a symbol of my faith. The answer was “no.”

Getting arrested in this act of civil disobedience hurt, physically, but more so spiritually. I’m used to mostly nice company and this was oppressive and it was abusive. I’m left forever altered and probably grateful, but scarred by the certain truth that people can fall so far from their best humane selves that they can treat anyone so poorly.

But there are worse scars and harder learnings. Everything I knew intellectually to be true about racism, internalized racism and white privilege I’ve now experienced up close where the pain to our siblings of color was anything but subtle. It’s one thing to understand that I won’t get stopped driving a nice car in Wellesley, Massachusetts, or Marblehead or Winchester and that a young black man quite possibly and at some times of night probably will [get stopped]. It’s quite another to witness an entire system in which the norm, the *norm*, is to intentionally do harm to people with brown and black skin and without blinking an eye treat white people better—and worst of all, to assume the white people won’t care.

Discussion Questions

- What situations systemically lead to humans behaving in inhumane ways? How does our faith speak to the degradation of human beings that Rev. von Zirpolo encountered?
- Rev. von Zirpolo suggests that because she is white, she did not suffer racial slurs or physical abuse. When have you been aware of preferential treatment granted to people who are white, or who are middle-class or upper-class?
- The police removed clerical collars before taking mug shots. Why do you suppose police officers do this? What effect do you think it has?

Economic and Legal Realities: Moral Perspectives

**“Arizona Bill 1070 – Immigration,” Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray, Unitarian
Universalist Congregation of Phoenix, AZ, April 25, 2010**

Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray expresses her dismay at the terrible prison of fear that surrounds both undocumented workers and their U.S. citizen allies and family members as a result of the passage of Arizona SB 1070. Rev. Frederick-Gray condemns the scapegoating of workers who have helped the United States prosper.

I am compelled to speak about Arizona bill 1070 that Governor Brewer signed into law on Friday afternoon.

Weeks ago I attended the Arizona House Subcommittee hearing on the bill, the only hearing on the bill. Yesterday I read the bill in full. As I read it, I found myself thinking about Theresa, a woman I met years ago, who crossed the border from Mexico illegally a long time ago, with her three children in tow. She left Mexico after her husband died. She could not find work and she couldn't feed her children. So she left her home to come to the United States to find work and provide for her family. I found myself thinking of her and the fear she must feel today not only for her own safety, but more deeply for her son and two daughters, fear that they will be arrested and deported, taken away from their spouses and children, to a country they cannot remember and do not know.

Reading the bill, I thought about the parents and the young adults who wonder if they should leave their families and return to Mexico, even though it would mean not being a part of their children's, or their sister's, or their spouse's life anymore. The stated intent of the bill is "attrition by enforcement," meaning to make the laws so strict, so severe and so far-reaching that it will cause undocumented immigrants to leave. But reading the bill, I could see a parent, a young adult, afraid of being caught trying to leave and equally afraid to stay here and live hidden.

I find it morally reprehensible that many of the people who are now being called "illegals" are the same men and women who were encouraged to come for jobs that helped build our economy. Like people everywhere, they got married; they built lives; they had children here. And now we want them to leave—to leave their lives and families.

I picture mothers and fathers all over the country waking "at the least sound in fear of what [their] life and [their] children's lives may be." I can only imagine the state of mind of, for example, the Mexican-American family in Chicago, all citizens, with a son who attends ASU — and whose only identification that he carries is his Illinois driver's license. Since Illinois grants driver's licenses without verification of legal status, his license won't be enough to protect their son from being arrested and detained.

We can and must resist this unjust law. We can resist by refusing to use the word "illegal" because it dehumanizes and covers over the human lives behind the rhetoric. Let us continue to remind ourselves and others of the larger economic and historical forces involved here. We can resist by abstaining from reporting on our friends and neighbors. We can resist by actively calling on the federal government to step up to their responsibility and to do the politically unpopular work of passing Comprehensive Immigration Reform, addressing the basic problems that are hurting us all. And, we can resist publicly by standing and witnessing our disagreement with this legislation. I will be doing that today and I hope you will be able to join me.

Discussion Questions

- Rev. Frederick-Gray cannot separate the bill she read from the people she is aware of who will be affected by the resulting law. How do you weigh the idea that while legal language is abstract, the people and situations that are impacted by a law are real people with real stories?
- As Unitarian Universalists we covenant to promote and affirm a world in which there is justice, liberty, and freedom for all people. How can your congregation be involved in advocacy for or against policy and legislation based on our religious values without falling into factions or parties?
- Rev. Frederick-Gray urges members of her congregation to resist the law on moral grounds and names some practical ways to do that. When and how has your faith or your moral values led you to resist an unjust law? What forms did or does that resistance take?

“Santuario: Sanctuary for All,” Rev. Kim K. Crawford Harvie, Arlington Street Church, Boston, MA, December 2, 2007

Rev. Kim Crawford Harvie explores the idea that both responses to immigration and fear of the “other” are and always have been motivated by economic factors. She points out that societal fear makes the exploitation of an underclass by corporate powers possible. She calls upon Unitarian Universalists to open our eyes to the grim reality of these injustices, rise up against fear, protest exploitation, and fully actualize the ideals of sanctuary.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, there were so few restrictions on immigration that there was no such thing as “illegal” people in the United States. Today, there are roughly seven million adults and five million children—twelve million new immigrants—who are here, among us, without documents to insure their place in the American dream.

I grew up with a somewhat romantic view of immigration. But the lofty ideals of seeking religious freedom or the promise of freedom were a thin veneer on the desperation experienced by those who were fleeing violence and poverty, let alone those who arrived as slaves. As one modern worker says, “We come here because of horrible economic conditions at home. We are not here by choice. Who in their right mind comes here knowing they will be insulted and looked at as a threat? Who risks their lives crossing a militarized border and leaves [behind] their family, their culture, their life ... unless they have to?” (*Interfaith Worker Justice*, “For You Were Once a Stranger: Immigration in the U.S. through the Lens of Faith,” p. 2)

America was founded on the principle of equal opportunity. Who will defend that high ideal? Who, if not we?

On May 8, 2007, Unitarian Universalist Association President Bill Sinkford gave our religious movement’s endorsement to the New Sanctuary Movement, calling not just for radical hospitality, but for what he named, prophetic hospitality. He wrote, “For our nation to be whole, we must acknowledge that our lives of privilege are supported in thousands of ways by people whose labor is invisible and whose suffering is hidden. Led by people of faith from many backgrounds who stand in solidarity with immigrant families, the New Sanctuary Movement seeks to take a united, public, moral stand for immigrant rights.” (New Sanctuary Movement at UUA.org)

The New Sanctuary Movement Pledge calls us to covenant to educating, advocating, and standing up for immigrants’ rights. Beloved spiritual companions, let us raise our voices; open our minds, our hearts, and our hands; and throw open our great doors yet wider to welcome the stranger. May we embody the bold tradition of this congregation, and make of our spiritual home a sanctuary for all people.

Discussion Questions

- How would you define the American Dream? How does immigration fit into your understanding of your own family narrative? How do today’s immigrants fit into your view of the American dream?
- How is the life you live supported “in a thousand ways by people whose labor is invisible and whose suffering is hidden,” as former UUA president Bill Sinkford states?
- What could you do to educate, advocate, and stand up for immigrant rights? What could your congregation do?

**“They Take Our Jobs!”: Reflecting on Immigration,” Rev. James C. Leach,
Unitarian Universalist Church of Charlotte, NC, October 19, 2008**

Acknowledging that Americans benefit from a global economy in which the cheapest labor is sought to keep consumer prices low, Rev. James Leach explores the moral imperatives of facing the truth about our economy as it relates to our national identity and our Unitarian Universalist faith.

It is considerably more apparent that the profitability of companies is enhanced when they are free to seek cheap labor anywhere in the world.

That’s one of my questions in the debate about immigration. Can you make a moral case, a *moral* case, for mobile capital and an immobile workforce? That is, how does one morally defend a system that says, if you already have resources, you are free to make money anywhere in the world. However, if you are “just” a worker, you are confined to your own national borders.

We do live in a global economy. But, do we think globally? Do we act globally? Do we do our ethics globally?

We are the ones recognizing and professing a “respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.” Where immigration is concerned, to whom does the “we” in that statement refer? Who are “we?”

I love this country. But, my faith reminds me, my ultimate allegiance is not to this country. My ultimate self-definition is not as a U.S. citizen. When I say “we,” I am constantly challenged to think in larger categories.

Not “we” meaning men.

Not “we” meaning white people.

Not “we” meaning straight people.

Not “we” meaning well educated, liberals.

And not even “we” meaning citizens of this country.

As we reflect on complex issues like immigration, as we overhear the voices of Charlotte’s immigrants, our faith constantly beckons us beyond all narrow definitions of “we.” It challenges us to expand our scope, to recognize that the real implications of a professed belief in an “interdependent web” may be less about a peaceful stroll through nature and more about the incredible personal dilemmas fostered by *our* participation in a global economy based on worker exploitation.

Maybe that’s how we can contribute to the still-raging debate about immigration.

Not from a self-interested standpoint asking “what’s in it for me.”

Not from a nationalist viewpoint seeing it as an “us” vs. “them” battle.

But from the worldview of the interdependent web recognizing that, in the end, there are no “they’s.”

There are only “we’s.”

This doesn’t offer us any easy, obvious answers. It does suggest a starting point for the conversation.

Discussion Questions

- Explore Unitarian Universalism's Seventh Principle, respect for the interdependent web in which we live. What does this Principle mean to you? How does it help us explore issues of economic equity?
- What does "we" mean to you when you speak of the interdependent web of existence of which we are a part? Who do you mean by "we"?
- Is it possible to live a comfortable, maybe even abundant life, and at the same time advocate and take action for others who are less fortunate?

“A Knock at the Door,” Rev. Michael Tino, Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Northern Westchester, Mount Kisco, NY, December 6, 2009

Sharing the story of a family torn apart by current immigration law, Rev. Michael Tino questions the criminalization of immigrants.

As a matter of theology—as a simple way of affirming and promoting the very first of our Unitarian Universalist Principles—we need to do what we can to humanize the immigrants in our community, to understand them as our neighbors, to see them as strangers worthy of our hospitality, to challenge ourselves to work so that their inherent worth and dignity is respected by all in our society.

And on this issue, our theology runs smack up against a brick wall of politics.

Despite the fact that working in this country without proper documentation is a crime comparable to speeding, we insist that those who have come here to seek a better life are “criminals.” It is very likely that I went over fifty-five miles per hour on the Taconic State Parkway on my way here. It is probable that I was among the slower drivers on that road, too. Should everyone on the Taconic this morning be taken from their homes in the middle of the night, handcuffed in front of their children? I think not.

We get angry because, after all, there are supposed to be legal ways to come into this country, are there not?

The truth is that for most poor people around our world, the legal immigration system is impossible to penetrate. In rushing to make these hard workers into criminals, we lose sight of the fact that it was not so long ago that millions of Irish and Italian immigrants got off of boats without paperwork and became a part of American society.

The only possible solution is comprehensive immigration reform. And not any old kind of immigration reform, either—[we want] immigration reform that provides a path to legalization for millions of undocumented workers, and immigration reform that prioritizes keeping families whole. No family should be torn apart by a knock on the door in the middle of the night.

David Bacon describes this kind of immigration reform on the website Truthout. He writes:

“We need to get rid of the laws that make immigrants criminals and working a crime. No more detention centers, no more ankle bracelets, no more firings, and no more raids. We need equality and rights. All people in our communities should have the same rights and status.”

Because no one should live in fear of a knock on the door.

Discussion Questions

- Where do Unitarian Universalist values come up against laws? Which Unitarian Universalist values are at play when it comes to immigration?
- What moral values are reflected in the current immigration law and how do they square with Unitarian Universalist values?
- In your opinion, what values should be represented in our immigration laws? What would comprehensive immigration reform look like if it were in line with Unitarian Universalist values?

"Ivan's Story," Rev. Thom Belote, Shawnee Mission Unitarian Universalist Church in Overland Park, KS, November 23, 2008

Relating the history of one person's journey to the United States, and his bid to legally immigrate years after living here, Rev. Thom Belote realizes "our immigration policies and enforcement in the United States are profoundly broken. They are destructive to communities, offensive to human dignity, and entirely lacking of a moral compass."

A minivan arrived, and all fifteen people who had been in the crossing party piled in. They drove non-stop for five hours until they arrived at their destination. The destination was a house with a single bathroom and the fifteen passengers in the minivan joined another 45 immigrants already waiting inside. The house had windows that locked from the outside and the immigrants waited until their accounts were settled. Finally, transportation to Kansas City was arranged and, in March of the year 2000, Ivan was dropped off at the corner of 435 and Metcalf. There, he reconnected with his neighbor and moved into a three-bedroom apartment that a dozen people shared.

Shortly thereafter, Ivan went to work as a dishwasher at a restaurant along Metcalf. Then he added a second job. His workday consisted of working from 8 in the morning until 3 in the afternoon at one restaurant, and then from 4 in the afternoon until 11 at night at another restaurant. In the hour he had between shifts, Ivan would often lock himself in a bathroom stall at one of the restaurants, set his watch, and catch twenty minutes of sleep. By working this excruciating work schedule, Ivan was able to not only repay his neighbor who had fronted the money for him to come to the United States, but he also managed to send money to his family back in Mexico.

Part of Ivan's experience included not only working hours that most of us would find hard to imagine, but doing so under some crummy employment conditions. Working for nationally recognized chain restaurants, Ivan was routinely passed over for pay increases even as he was given greater responsibilities. He walked away from one such job when he was offered the position of store manager at the pay rate of a dishwasher.

An additional risk that Ivan faced was being an easy target for theft and violence. An immigrant who has his wallet stolen or even is assaulted finds it difficult to go the police. In fact, immigrants are actually easy targets for criminals because they are afraid of reporting crimes.

Discussion Questions

- Ivan's story offers a tiny glimpse of life as an undocumented worker. What strikes you the most about this and other stories of undocumented workers you may know or have read about? How do these stories call you to action?
- The stories we read offer glimpses of people who feel compelled to immigrate without papers in order to improve their lives, or even save their lives and the lives of their children. How do our Unitarian Universalist values call us to respond to such stories, and to the circumstances, policies, and laws that create these circumstances?
- What responsibility do we each have for participation in an economic and social system that allows for the systematic exploitation of those without documentation?

“Standing on the Side of Love: Immigration,” Rev. Kendyl Gibbons, First Unitarian Society of Minneapolis, MN, October 25, 2009

Rev. Kendyl Gibbons points out that immigration is really migration, a recurring event in the natural and human world that features families moving in order to provide sustenance and safety. She asks how our antiquated, even cruel, legal immigration policies and exploitation of undocumented workers offers the kind of system that will help humanity rise to its highest potential.

Personally, I long for a world in which it makes no more sense for Korea to aim missiles at China than it does for Kansas to bomb North Dakota; where someone can move from El Salvador to New York to find a better job as easily as they can move from California to Texas. If Unitarian Universalists believe what we say about the goal of world community, with liberty and justice for all, it seems to me that this is a vision we share.

Do you believe in democracy? True democracy includes the voices and votes of everyone who is affected by a decision, and continually strives to extend its franchise. Is it not the very opposite of democracy to create a second class of those who must abide by laws and policies that they have no influence in formulating? In our increasingly connected world, where what we do to the earth impacts all the people of the earth, can we afford a democracy only of the privileged? Or are we not called upon to take into account the needs and the dreams, the wishes and the ambitions of people wherever they are?

For in the end, if our liberal faith teaches us nothing else, surely it teaches this—that there is no “us” and “them”; that only evil ever results from thinking that humanity can be divided into those who matter and those who don’t. We are in it together, for whatever this life and this world are worth. The doors to injustice open wide whenever we start to believe that there are any people who need not be treated in the ways we have agreed we must treat each other. All people are our neighbors, no matter where they live; we share the air and the atmosphere, the seas and the aquifers, the nuclear power plants and the nuclear bombs, the corporations and the stock market fluctuations. The earth is our common wealth, and it is only when we welcome one another that we are just, and only when we are just that we are secure. We have only one shared future on this planet; either our capacity for competition will kill us, or our capacity for cooperation will save us.

Discussion Questions

- Rev. Gibbons asks: “Are we not called upon to take into account the needs and the dreams, the wishes and the ambitions of people wherever they are?” This is a powerful statement. How do you and your congregation take into account the dreams, wishes, and ambitions of all people? Is it possible to do so?
- How would you define “world community”? Do you believe in and support the goal of a world community named in our sixth Unitarian Universalist Principle?
- Rev. Gibbons says: “The doors to injustice open wide whenever we start to believe that there are any people who need not be treated in the ways we have agreed we must treat each other.” Do you believe that there are people who should not be treated as we must treat each other? If so, who would those people be? If not, what are you doing to change systems of systemic oppression in the United States and in the world?
- Rev. Gibbons says: “We have only one shared future on this planet; either our capacity for competition will kill us, or our capacity for cooperation will save us.” Do you agree or disagree? Why?

“Immigration: the Dream and the Nightmare,” Rev. Kate Lore, First Unitarian Church of Portland, OR, January 20, 2008

Rev. Kate Lore looks to the expansive, inclusive theology of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., to help Unitarian Universalists remember how important it is to stand in solidarity with the disenfranchised. Further, she asks Unitarian Universalists to look beyond their fear of the scapegoated illegal immigrant to the root cause of their diasporas, big business.

Polls show that there is a deep sense of alarm about illegal immigration in all sectors of our society. Even those of us who worship here on Sundays are divided on this issue.

The question that policymakers have not faced *honestly* is this one: Why do these immigrants come? The answer is not that they are *pulled* by our jobs and government benefits. But that they are *pushed* by the abject poverty that their families face in Mexico. That might seem like a mere semantic difference, but it's huge if you're trying to develop a policy to stop the human flood across our border.

Although you never hear it mentioned in the debates on this issue, most Mexican people would really rather stay in their own country.

You see, I think that instead of putting all of our energy into coming down on the workers who illegally cross our borders, we should shift our gaze upward and start looking at all of the businesses on both sides of the borders that are profiting so hugely from NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement]. For these are the people who are causing the increase of undocumented Mexican workers.

These corporations are the profiteering few who have rigged all of our trade and labor policies to exploit workers and destroy small farms—not just in Mexico, but everywhere.

So, do we have reason to fear for our jobs and our financial future? Yes, but it is not because of the immigrants crossing our borders. It is because the Middle Class is indeed shrinking. And it's this economic fragility that anti-immigrant zealots are feeding upon. But it is extremely important to note that even if there were no illegal workers in this country—none—the fragility would remain. You see, it's not the impoverished Mexican workers who downsized and off-shored our middle-class jobs; it's not our undocumented workers who reclassified millions of employees as “independent contractors,” leaving them with no benefits or labor rights. They are not the ones who subverted the right of workers to organize. Or who made good health care a luxury item. Or who let rich campaign donors take over our political process. Powerless immigrants did not do these things. But powerless immigrants are being used as scapegoats.

Being in community with one another as we explore this hot button issue can help us focus on the systems at play rather than blaming the victims of the system.

Discussion Questions

- How has life changed for you in the recent years of the economic downturn? For your neighbors, family, or friends? What factors, entities, or people do you blame for the weak economy?
- What are some of the basic expectations you have about employment in the United States? Do you expect affordable healthcare, labor rights, and a retirement plan? How have those expectations changed over time?
- Rev. Lore states that migrants are being “pushed” into the United States rather than “pulled.” Have you experienced being “pushed” by difficult circumstances into changing your employment or where you live? What was that experience like?
- Do you agree that immigrants, documented and undocumented, are being scapegoated, held responsible for difficult economic circumstances in the United States? How can you and your congregation work to recognize and counter the scapegoating of powerless peoples?

“Immigration, Politics and How We Move Forward,” Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray, Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Phoenix, AZ, January 24, 2010

While concentrating on one woman’s story, Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray explores the complexity of immigration.

I met a young woman at a Women’s Leadership training event. She was just 20 years old, intelligent, articulate, and driven. And she had a dream. The trainer at the event asked each of us what we wanted to accomplish in our lives. The trainer was looking for us to be clear and specific. Most of us gave vague, meandering answers, something about making a difference, something about justice or personal strength. When it was this young woman’s turn, her answer was absolutely clear. “My goal is to become a U.S. citizen,” she said. I was shocked. I had been talking with this woman all weekend. She was Latina, yes, but had no accent. She seemed as American to me as I do. I never would have guessed she was not a citizen.

The trainer asked her to share more of her story. She explained that her parents came to this country when she was two years old, bringing her with them to join her grandfather who was living in Chicago. For many years her grandfather worked to become a citizen through the naturalization process. Then, just weeks before his naturalization ceremony which would have paved the way for her to apply for citizenship, he died. At that point, the entire family lost their path to citizenship.

Here was this young woman, who had come here with a way to citizenship, but which was now lost. She had come here when she was two years old. She knew no other country, no other home. As a testament to her courage and her passion, she was not living in the shadows. No, she was pursuing her dream as actively as she could. She was meeting with her state and federal legislators to explain her case and fight for citizenship.

Of course, this young woman’s story is not unique. Many of the most heart breaking stories are those of young adults who were brought here as children. They are innocent in this mess, and yet they grow up homeless—without a home land. They are culturally Americans. They learn our system of government and laws in our school. They have dreams of college and careers and families, but they are told they are not recognized, not wanted—that they are illegal.

Imagine what that would be like. To live your whole life in this country, as many of us have done. To have friends, family, and community and still be unable to pursue your dreams, unable to live freely. What happens to someone when they cannot follow their dreams? When they have done nothing wrong, yet they have to live like a criminal, without rights, vulnerable to all types of abuse, with no protections or recourse? What happens to the human spirit under those conditions?

Discussion Questions

- Imagine having to leave your home, your community, and travel to a land you do not know where they speak a language you do not speak. Imagine doing this with few possessions and little or no money in your pocket. How would you feel? What would you take with you? What would you miss?
- Rev. Frederick-Gray tells one person’s story because she wants to emphasize that immigration is about people, not “immigrants” but mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, grandmothers, all with names and interesting, important lives. How can we hear the myriad individual stories? How can or should those stories help to guide us to a response that matches our values and beliefs?

Visions

“Dreamers and the Dream,” Rev. Carlton Elliott Smith, Unitarian Universalist Church of Arlington, VA, January 16, 2011

Reflecting on Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech, Rev. Carlton Elliott Smith notes that King promised not personal monetary gain or political power but “a harvest of freedom, justice and equality for this country that everyone could reap from coast to coast.”

A dream has the power to change the world. Though much of the language in Dr. King’s “I Have a Dream” speech is framed in terms of black people and white people, we get a sense of the ultimate universality of his message.

Dr. King was working for the purpose of saving the soul of America. Like so many of our elected officials, he believed in our democracy, in our way of government and its ability to be transformative and represent all people.

Dr. King’s dream calls for constant renewal. He had an idea and vision of what renewal would look like in his time; but each of us has a chance now to reflect on how we can expand on his dream today in our contexts, with our issues, in our own time. Many of the things that he dreamed have come to pass but as more things come to pass it creates more opportunity for us to find ourselves anew in his dream. I started to think: “If I were dreaming a dream today, what would that dream include?”

I have a dream that one day we all live in peace, free of the scourge of random acts of violence perpetuated on innocent and vulnerable people.

I have a dream that the most troubled among us are protected from doing harm to themselves and to others.

I have a dream that one day everyone has enough money, food, clothing, health care, and opportunities that they can get their basic needs met without having to leave friends and family behind in their homelands.

I have a dream that the immigration policies of the United States will be guided by what is fair and compassionate instead of what is politically expedient.

I have a dream that our foreign policy reflects the best interest of everyday people more than it favors multinational corporations.

I have a dream that the Dreamers among us have the chance to reach the fullness of their potential, and they and their families live free of hostility and fear.

Discussion Questions

- What are your dreams for our collective future? Please write on a piece of paper as many “I have a dream ...” statements as flow from your thoughts. Once all have exhausted their list, share your dreams with each other. How do your dreams touch on the situation of immigrants and migrants in the United States and in the world?
- Rev. King was not a Unitarian Universalist, and yet UUs hold him and his remarkable work as exemplary of the kind of work UUs must enact in order to build beloved community. How did Dr. King’s dream change the world? How can you and your congregation work to help your dreams change the world?

“The Stranger,” Rev. Wendy von Zirpolo, the Unitarian Universalist Church of Marblehead, MA, May 15, 2011

Rev. Wendy von Zirpolo describes the experience of being mocked, cat-called, and pointed at with anger and derision when she testified in support of immigrants. She points out our nearly universal welcoming of a child in our midst, and wonders why so many of us afraid of youth and adult strangers. Why, she asks, don't we instead heed ancient wisdom to welcome and provide hospitality for all strangers?

With each decade I learn that our answers lie closer to home. And I find myself returning to old sacred texts as I seek to make meaning and find those answers.

Matthew 25:35: For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in.

Job 31:32: But no stranger had to spend the night in the street, for my door was always open to the traveler

Isaiah 58:7: Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

Romans 12:13: Practice hospitality.

Hebrews 13:2: Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.

Returning to sacred texts and the hard-earned lesson that the only behavior we can alter is our own. And so what are we to do? If like me, your reaction to the child wandering in on a Sunday morning is one of delight, wonder and welcome, but perhaps not as quick or natural when it's a youth or adult, we can begin right there. We can practice our welcome to the stranger here and take it to the streets. We can become a hospitality committee of the whole, joining others across ethnic boundaries, age, abilities, all identities. We can be brave, offering the smile the child received so readily, to every person, especially those who are most different. Every person whether we share spoken language or not. We can be kind, offering the caring eyes the babe knows without a word, to every person, every day, everywhere. We can be ambassadors of peace, love, and care when we see others who dare not or know not how. We can welcome the stranger and allow the stranger to welcome us. For it is not ours to own, this world. Each of us strangers. Each of us connected. Each of us the babe entering a new world—the tomorrow of our making.

Discussion Questions

- Consider the biblical quotations Rev. von Zirpolo offers in this sermon. Are they familiar to you? What do they mean to you? Do you accept them as a call? How would you and how would your faith community make them so?
- Why is it that almost universally people are willing to approach and help/welcome a child, but not an adult? What would you do to change your own behavior regarding the youth or adult stranger?
- How practical steps can you and your congregation take toward welcoming all people?

“Immigration and Ezekiel 37: 1-14,” Rev. Laura Everett, Director of the Massachusetts Council of Churches and a United Church of Christ minister. This sermon was delivered at King’s Chapel, Boston, MA, April 10, 2011

Using the reading Ezekiel 37: 1-14, Rev. Laura Everett reaches into the power of biblical language to evoke our deepest strength, the ability to see each other as the biblical God sees us: as human and worthy.

The earth rattles, the bone connects to bone, sinew binds, flesh covers and skin enfolds. And like something from a video game, the bones are made into mortals—a standing vacant mass, eyes that are as empty as they look. But there is no life.

It is only when God breathes life into them that the bodies live. You know this. You know that it is possible to live without being alive.

Look to our southern border, the space between life and death. This text asks us to be Ezekiel, looking at the abundance of death and prophesying life. The problem for us as the Church with the immigration debate in this country is that we are speaking of it in the abstract. As Christians, this is not an abstract issue about immigration, this is about how we think and treat other humans. Not immigration, immigrants. This is not about immigration, this is about immigrants. We can talk about law and policy certainly, but as Christians we do not start from these places. We start from the reality of the flesh and breath. We are talking about real human beings, made in the image of God. We are very good at arguing as Democrats or Republicans, but that is not who made us. We are children of God. Our mortal flesh is marked. This is where we begin. We are to see our fellow human beings, regardless of their country of origin, as God sees them. As human.

The further we separate ourselves from the stories and real experiences of new immigrants, the drier our hearts become. This morning we sit in this church, 2.4 miles away in the Suffolk County House of Corrections, sit humans who are being treated like anything but.

More than anything right now, people of faith have the ability to change the conversation. For those of us in majority culture that means reclaiming our scriptures as teaching us values about how strangers are treated in strange lands. For those in the newer immigrant community, it means recognizing the story of immigrants in the stories of scripture. We will work on the policy, we will work on just and sustainable laws. But first we must see one another as human beings, as flesh that rips along barbed wires and souls that lose hope when cut off completely. The Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel points out that Ezekiel’s vision in the valley of dry bones bears no date because every generation needs to hear in its own time that these dry bones must live again. We must take on Ezekiel’s prophetic imagination and see life among dry bones. God shows power and might beyond our imagination, binding up bone and flesh, re-membering those left for dead. Ours is to remember. We must see one another as God sees.

Discussion Questions

- Ms. Everett's sermon calls on ancient biblical texts to help guide our thinking about immigration. Does calling on the words of scripture evoke a different response in you than sharing stories of people?
- Please read [Ezekiel 37: 1-14](#). Consider Elie Weisel's observation—in Everett's words—that "Ezekiel's vision in the valley of dry bones bears no date because every generation needs to hear in its own time that these dry bones must live again." Why? How is or is not Ezekiel 37: 1-14 a timeless story/metaphor?
- How can Unitarian Universalists look to the wisdom of this ancient text for help in meeting the challenges of our own time?

**“Welcome to the Borderlands,” Rev. Fred Small, First Parish in Cambridge,
Unitarian Universalist, MA, September 19, 2010**

Focusing on the idea of borderlands, Rev. Fred Small, with the help of poets and philosophers, invites us to see the land in between as a place of wondrous possibility, a place of fertile intermixing of ideas and cultures, a place that may promise a rich, diverse, infinitely interesting future that teaches as it challenges.

White people can try to escape the borderlands, seeking shelter in gated communities, social clubs, segregated churches, and reactionary movements that preach intolerance and xenophobia—as if we were actually better off in 1952, or 1848, or 1781 than we are today.

Or we can explore the borderlands, learn from them, and thrive in them. Two decades ago, in her classic bilingual meditation *Borderlands/La Frontera*, the late Chicana lesbian poet and essayist Gloria Anzaldúa acknowledged that borderlands are hazardous terrain. “Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe,” she wrote, “to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants.”

But it is in these borderlands, Anzaldúa argued, that we learn to transcend borders. Grappling with our plurality, we discover our unity. She embraced a hybrid culture of mixed heritage, *una cultura mestiza*. “The new *mestiza*,” she wrote, develops “a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. . . . She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode—nothing is thrust out . . . nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. . . . It is work that the soul performs. That focal point or fulcrum, that juncture where the *mestiza* stands, is where phenomena tend to collide. It is where the possibility of uniting all that is separate occurs.”

Now, I invite my white brothers and sisters to notice that there’s nothing in border consciousness about shame or self-hatred, any more than traveling abroad or learning a language other than English makes one anti-American. The borderlands expand our horizons. They call us to be more curious, more agile, and more adventurous. Feeling bad about ourselves doesn’t help anybody. I cherish my English, Scottish, and Irish heritage, even as I acknowledge white privilege and work for justice and equality.

Discussion Questions

- Within the borderlands, we learn to transcend borders, poet Gloria Anzaldúa says. Within your life have you seen the affect Anzaldúa describes? Do you see the intermixing of cultures having a positive effect on your community or your family?
- Rev. Small addresses the shame and self-hatred white people might feel facing the long history of white dominance and white oppression of people of color. What intrigues you about his invitation to enter the borderland and become “more curious, more agile, and more adventurous”?
- How can your community build bridges and enter territory that might expand the vitality of all involved?