



**The Immigrant Experience in Ohio
A 30-Day Prayer Guide**



From the Prayer Ministry
of Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA



The Immigrant Experience in Ohio

Introduction

Written from an Anabaptist/Mennonite perspective, this prayer guide has primarily been written for individuals to use in their time of daily devotional reading and prayer. The materials include stories from immigrants who have related to the Hispanic Ministries of Ohio Conference (Brazo en Brazo in Lima and Open Arms in Wayne County), prayers written by Mennonites from across the country, and reflections on scriptures related to welcoming the stranger.

Using this Guide

While designed for individual use, this resource may be adapted for family devotionals or Sunday School class discussions. The stories and prayers found in this resource could be used in a special prayer time or as a children's story in corporate worship.

Ohio Conference equips pastors and congregations for ministry. This particular resource comes from the Prayer Ministry of the Conference. Additional copies of this guide may be downloaded free of charge at www.ohiomennoniteconference.org. Select Resource Teams, then Prayer. Additional immigration resources are listed at the end of this guide.

About the Contributors

Original materials were contributed by Paul and Ann Conrad, Mike and Mattie Marie Mast, Haroldo Nunes, and Raúl Tadéo. *PeaceSigns*, an ezine from Mennonite Church USA, granted permission to reprint some of their prayers. Special thanks to Mike and Mattie Marie Mast for their editorial work and oversight.

Day 1



Getting Started

Estimates indicate that there are more than 12 million undocumented immigrants in the United States today. Many are Hispanics who have crossed the U.S.-Mexico border seeking work. They are our neighbors who are strangers within our towns, and they are part of the largest ethnic minority in our country.

Congregations and organizations like Open Arms and Brazo en Brazo along with the leadership of Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Central Committee are befriending these people.

The idea for this prayer guide grew out of a desire to raise awareness of the challenges that immigrants face in our own communities. It seemed best to begin with ourselves and examining these concerns in the presence of God.

We invite you to use this daily prayer guide for a month. It will inform our prayers and give us a better sense of the needs around us. There are stories of the experiences of the immigrants. There are prayers we might offer. There are biblical reflections. There are reminders that many of our histories grow out of immigrant experiences.

The joy of accompanying our new neighbors and giving them a loving welcome will be an answer to many of our prayers. Thank you for taking this journey.

PRAYER:

Lord, we praise you for the way you have provided for us. We thank you for our families and friends. Stir within us compassion, to share our land and resources as they have been shared with us. Teach us to pray for our neighbors. Fill us with your love that leads us to action in Christ's name. Amen.

Day 2

Emilio and Cecilia Gallegos

In the late 1980s, Emilio came to Ohio and worked in the vegetable fields. His wife, Cecilia, and seven children remained at their home in Mexico. There were times he spent nights sleeping under a bridge. To be offered a place to stay at Huber Mennonite Church was a significant opportunity he accepted along with four others from the same village in Mexico. During the evening hours Emilio and his friends practiced their music and studied English at Huber Mennonite.



In November 1994, Paul and Ann Conrad ventured across the border into Mexico. Emilio invited them to stay with his family. It was strawberry harvest time and the Gallegos family picked strawberries.

Each year in March, Emilio left the family to go to work at New Carlisle, Ohio, in construction work. As his building skills improved, Emilio was able to finish his family's house in Mexico.

In August of 1998, Emilio was received as a naturalized citizen of the United States. Then, Emilio began the process of getting green cards for his family. In August of 2001, the family left Mexico, with some sadness, and immediately faced the challenge of getting the five youngest enrolled in the local schools and the new need of buying a car.

As a family the Gallegos return each year to Mexico to celebrate Christmas and New Year. The journey for them continues. Yes, they have come a long way. As we journey with them, we learn and share together. We are mutually enriched and encouraged. This is the essence of Brazo En Brazo.

PRAYER:

Lord, we thank you the new life that Emilio and Cecilia have found. Thank you for Huber Mennonite Church and churches like it that welcome immigrants. Help our churches to show the love of Christ to our neighbors who are finding a new life. Amen.

Day 3



An Immigrant Prayer

I walk with my brothers and sisters in desolation, are you here God?
Please don't be far. I am afraid and my soul is trembling.
You cried in Gethsemane, come cry with me.

Many hunt for us and we are accused of breaking the law;
You have been persecuted, come be our witness, defend our cause.
Make known the roots of our suffering and the causes of our journey.
Make public that our intentions are in accord to your law.
Intercede for those who walk with us in this path.
Make their rights be known, and their voices be heard.
Guide the feet of those who get lost.

You know the darkness. Hold our hands.
In the dim night shine your light and direct our path.
Restore the lands of our ancestors.
Bring justice to our people.
Pour rain on their crops, and give them peace to harvest their fruit.

Anxiety and fear are our companions in our journey;
replace them with peace and hope.
Nurture our spirits while we are far from home.
Be with our loved ones.

Do not let time erase the way back home, so that we may not live in exile forever. The desert is arid and thirst awaits us. You know the desert.

You've been exiled.
Come walk with us, and bring a fountain of justice into our lives.
Sow seeds of peace and justice in the hearts and minds
of those who resist our journey.

Let us be seeds of peace and hope in our new home, this land of our exile.



Written by Saulo Padilla, MCC U.S. Director, Office on Immigration Education.

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Day 4

Abram, the Immigrant

Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled there....

The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great ... and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

So Abram left, as the Lord had told him.... He took his wife, Sarai, his nephew Lot, and all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land.

— Genesis 11:31; 12:1-6 NIV



The story of Abraham might remind us that the father of our faith is portrayed as an immigrant. Hebrews 11:9a says of him, "By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country."

The theme of immigrants is not forgotten in the Bible. It is a theme with which Hispanics and people of European, Asian, and African descent living in America can identify.

We may not know everything that causes Abram to leave Ur, but we see that he feels called by God to start a new life for a new people in a strange land. Abram and his group are strangers in Canaan, and it is not always easy for them to find pasture and water for their flocks.

Immigrants are not always welcomed, but the Christian attitude toward them should be clear! Do we welcome them as we would want to be welcomed? That is the Golden Rule.

PRAYER: Lord, help us to identify with the immigrants that we meet in our neighborhoods. Help us to respect their humanity. Help us to learn how to make them feel welcomed. Amen.

Day 5



Sonya's Story

I was looking forward to being with my husband again after being separated for one year. He had gone to Ohio to get work, and I stayed in Mexico with our children. We missed him so much. We were looking forward to being family again. I sold all our belongings in Mexico, and finally the day arrived for us to see our husband and father again in Ohio. All our dreams became true: we arrived safely, we had a sponsor, and we were looking forward to some stability again.

However, three weeks after my arrival, my husband told me that he never loved me and that he didn't want to be with me anymore. My whole world collapsed. Here I was, far away from my family and without friends. What was he thinking when he brought us here? I couldn't sleep nor eat, and I went into depression. I was ready to die. Every day when I woke up I was so mad at God and asked: Why didn't God simply fix everything? We went to see a therapist, but our marriage did not survive.

With all of the anxiety and depression I was ready to turn my back against God. How can my God, my Father, let this happen to me, when He promised to be with me? Where was God?

One day, two women from church knocked on my door when I just wanted to sleep and die. Now, I am a part of that church, and I see that God was there for me. I have learned to depend on God and on my church family. My church family has encouraged me to teach English and help others who come to work here and are separated from their families and friends in order to earn a living.

Prayer: Lord, we thank you for Sonya. Help more churches find ways to reach out to people like Sonya. Make us caring communities that give people support in many difficult situations. Help us to sacrifice some of our own comforts to accompany hurting people. Amen.

Sonya attends an Ohio Conference Mennonite Church. This story was recorded as told to Mattie Marie Mast.



Day 6

Praying for a Caring Spirit

Sovereign Lord God, we recognize that we are too often selfish, distracted and forgetful. It is so easy for us to be that way. Why not?

Our world seems to revolve around ourselves. But there are other people, some hurting people, needing a friend, some looking to us, needing hope. Needing God. They are a part of our world, too!

We are too often distracted by little things—new curtains for our bedroom, this or that game, this dress, that shirt—good things.

Not that important.
O outgoing God, have mercy on us.
We too often forget about you and your purposes.
Yes, you want us to be delighted with good things, but you want us to care also about other people.

Help us to remember that your kingdom exists for everyone.
Everyone needs a home, an income, health care, justice and peace.
Help us not to get carried away with caring only about ourselves.
Help us to remember that your kingdom is bigger than us, our family, our friends, our school, or even our church.

May your kingdom come closer now to our earth, even through us, through Jesus.

Amen.



Written by Mike Mast, retired pastor from Dalton, Ohio.

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Day 7

The Story of Jesús and Verónica Saragosa

Paul and Ann Conrad were able to visit the home of Jesús Saragosa and his wife, Verónica, in Mexico in 1994. Jesús had recently returned from a season of work in Ohio.

In 1996, Jesús brought the family, now with four children, to Ohio. Jesús was encouraged to apply for citizenship since he had legal residency status for more than five years, which is the first requirement. He filled out the long application and sent in the fee. After several months, he was called for fingerprints, another fee.



In 2000, Jesús received his appointment for an interview for citizenship, eight months after sending in his application. He had studied the 100 questions. He had learned English. He had prayed. When his name was called, he went in alone, behind closed doors with the examiner. He spoke English adequately. It was the questions that proved to be too difficult. Two months later he had a new appointment and the second opportunity. This time he passed and received his certificate in a naturalization ceremony.

Jesús had attended the worship, educational, friendship, and service activities of the Spanish-speaking group at Huber Mennonite regularly, and when his family came, he introduced them to growing in the love of God. Later Jesús and Verónica were baptized.

After more than 11 years of apartment and trailer living, they are working at purchasing a house in New Carlisle. Jesús observes, “Even though life is not easy here, it is better for us to be poor in the U.S. than to be poor in Mexico.”

PRAYER:

Lord, we pray for those who have a long, hard struggle to find a good life for their families. May we learn from Jesus and the teachings of the Bible about our attitude toward immigrants. Forgive us for being judgmental or indifferent. Amen.

Day 8

Jesus on Immigrants



When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats....

Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 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....

Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?"

The king will reply, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." — Matthew 25:31-40 NIV

When Christians think of immigrants we do not think first of legality and documentation. We think of the hospitality that Jesus taught in line with the Old Testament.

Jesus says that in the great judgment of all the nations an important element will be justice. Were the hungry fed, the thirsty given drink, the strangers invited to come in, the naked clothed, the sick cared for, and the prisoners visited?

Are these actions, or just beliefs? Does Jesus empathize with the needy? Might that not be the reason he says that if we do it for his brothers and sisters we are doing it for him? Does he expect us to welcome strangers/immigrants even if they don't have a document from our government? How will we be judged?

PRAYER:

Lord, forgive us for despising those in need, especially strangers. Transform us and give us the kind of compassion that you have had for us. Help us to treat others, even strangers, as we would want to treat you. Amen.

Day 9



A Prayer to be Reborn and Converted Over and Over Again

God of New Birth and Conversion...

Grant me the ability to see through,
the ability to see into
the ability to see without blinders
To see as You see and hear as You hear.

Keep me from a false conversion,

One which would seek comfort in prayer and be
lulled into complacency
Asking for consolation for my own spirit
Domesticating Jesus' urgent message of peace with justice
Praying for God's intervention to save me from things
not created by God, but by humankind.

Lead me gently into true conversion and transformation, over and over again,

To search for the truth behind the truth, the whole truth,
to grasp all of what is there
To see a whole world instead of a partial one
To be aware of the holy in everything
To respond to a call, a call from the God who has no voice,
and who speaks in everything that is
To respond to the God who speaks in the depths of my own being.

May transformation lead me to a consciousness with conviction

A consciousness which cries out in witness to
the injustices and desolations
A consciousness to commit myself to the long-term cost
of seeing the vision through despite the pain and
the losses and the dull demands of dailiness.

May my conversion and transformation lead me to a consciousness
with courage and constancy.

Lead me gently, O God, but with certainty.

Rebirth me and convert me into Your image, over and over again.

Written by Mattie Marie Mast, Prayer Ministry Coordinator for Ohio Conference.

Day 10

Lost in Translation

I was sitting beside Carlos and translating the morning message into Spanish. At one point, he pulled up his coat sleeve. Apparently, the lining of the coat irritated his arm. He exposed a nasty burn on his under forearm. I guess the horror on my face was apparent. *Oh, it's a lot better than it had been several weeks ago.* Suddenly, I couldn't even hear the words of the sermon but was totally lost in a painful reality next to me. *It's a chemical burn from my work place,* Carlos explained. I dragged my mind back to the sermon, a good sermon from Jonah.

We looked up the text in the Spanish Bible, and I asked Carlos if he was able to read the text. *No, the chemicals have blurred my vision as well. I can see far away but not to read close up. One time I stayed at home for one month, and then my eyes cleared up.* What was perhaps most upsetting for me was that Carlos shared this information matter-of-factly, not expecting any pity or comfort, seemingly totally accepting of working in a dangerous environment. Again, I found myself trying to wrap my mind around Carlos' reality of living as a stranger in a foreign land, barely understanding English, working in conditions which are harmful to his health in order to send money back to his numerous family members. Deep within me I breathed, "Lord have mercy." I felt like a hypocrite and powerless. I heard the pastor say, "God spoke to Jonah several times because he didn't get it the first time.... Jesus' disciples were a motley crew, imperfect, didn't get Jesus' message, but Jesus still used them." I think this message is for me, not for Carlos, I surmised.

As we stood to sing the last hymn projected on the wall I heard Carlos sing with a clear voice and with gusto in English, "Soon and very soon we are going to see the King; no more crying there, we are going to see the King... Hallelujah! We're going to see the King."

Prayer: Lord, we thank you for all who work in the industries that serve us. We pray for those people. Forgive us for allowing some to be treated with less respect than others. May we be able to stand with them, especially the strangers, who need someone who can speak for them and their situation.

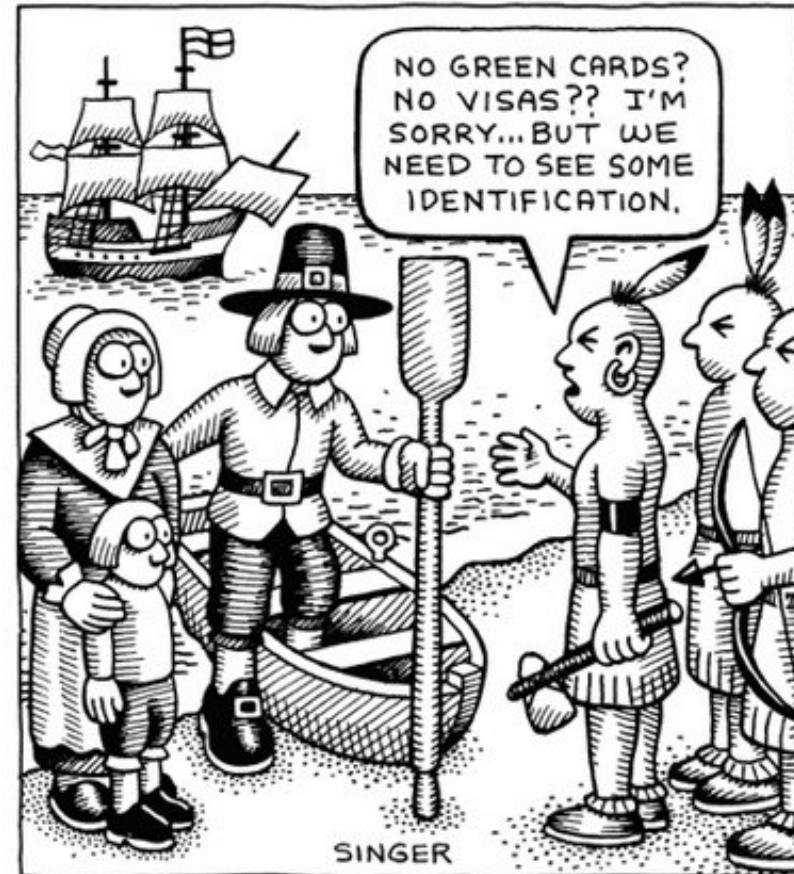
Written Nov. 22, 2009, by Mattie Marie Mast, Prayer Coordinator for Ohio Conference.

Day 11

NO EXIT

© Andy Singer

THE FIRST ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS



Prayer:

Lord, may your Spirit help us to identify with the plight of those who come to this country to escape what they suffer at home. We pray that immigration reform laws may be fair and freed from politics and selfishness. Show us the way to impact that legislation. Amen.

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Day 12



Prayer for Peace

God who holds the world in loving hands,
we give thanks for your love that knows no limits.
No borders stop your grace;
no boundaries prevent your mercy.

You call us to offer the same generous love
to all your children as we receive,
and yet we struggle to lay aside our fears
and our prejudices to follow you.

Even in the body of Christ
we look askance at sisters and brothers
whose worship or polity or theology
is different from ours.

We confess the limits of our love
even as we long for freedom
to open our hearts and minds and arms
to embrace all your family.

Unite us in your love, we pray,
with one another in the body of Christ,
with all people of faith,
and even with our enemies.

We pray in the name of our Triune God,
in whose eternal communion we find life,
and in whose unending love we find hope,
now and forever. Amen.

*Written by Marlene Kropf, Mennonite Church USA Executive Leadership,
Denominational Minister of Worship.*

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Day 13

Israel, Immigrants in Egypt

Joseph went and told Pharaoh, "My father and brothers, with their flocks and herds and everything they own, have come from the land of Canaan and are now in Goshen." ... Pharaoh asked the brothers, "What is your occupation?"

"Your servants are shepherds," they replied to Pharaoh, "just as our fathers were." They also said to him, "We have come to live here awhile, because the famine is severe in Canaan and your servants' flocks have no pasture." ...

Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Your father and your brothers have come to you, and the land of Egypt is before you; settle your father and your brothers in the best part of the land... And if you know of any among them with special ability, put them in charge of my own livestock." ...

And Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty. My years have been few and difficult, and they do not equal the pilgrimage of my fathers." Then Jacob blessed Pharaoh and went out of his presence. — Genesis 47:1-10 NIV



Jacob sees himself as a pilgrim, an immigrant. Again many of us are reminded of our own history. Our ancestors came to this country because of persecution and poverty in Europe.

Jacob and his family go to Egypt because of a severe famine in Canaan. They are welcomed there by Joseph and Pharaoh and given the best part of the land. They are also offered jobs according to their abilities. In his turn, Jacob blesses Pharaoh.

The story changes when a new Pharaoh begins to see these immigrants as a threat. He turns them into slaves.

Are some of the immigrants among us treated almost as slaves? Are they offered only the worst jobs? Do they suffer in conditions where their health is compromised?

PRAYER:

Lord, help us to be a people who knows how and wants to welcome those who come to our country for work. Help us to have compassion on them in their need. Forgive us for attitudes that would subject them to be like slaves. Amen.

Day 14



An Immigrant's Transformation

On Feb. 19, 2006, two friends brought "Mario" to our home. He had a patch over one eye. His eye was so badly crossed that if it was not covered it made him feel dizzy. He was also having bad headaches. Mario admitted that he had been drinking with friends, and he felt that was the cause of his problem.

I quickly made an appointment for Mario with a local doctor who sent him to a specialist in Cleveland. As I sat with him in the waiting room, he learned that Mario was from Mexico where he had a wife and children. He had been active in the Catholic church there and had helped the priest do Bible studies in people's homes. Now he felt God was punishing him for his drinking.

Raul invited him to the Salem Mennonite Church of Wooster. There he was surrounded by praying people, and he felt something pass through his body that made him feel well. His eye began to straighten, and his headaches began to disappear.

Mario has stopped drinking and has attended Salem faithfully. He thanks God for all that has been done for him. His friends in the apartment where he was living have also changed. Mario has recently returned to Mexico to be with his family and to be a witness for Christ.

PRAYER:

Lord, we pray for persons like Mario who are suffering from loneliness in our country. Help us to become their friends and spiritual guides as we show them Christian hospitality. May many freedom from despair in the Lord as Mario did. Amen.

Written by Raúl Tadéo, coordinator for Open Arms Hispanic Ministries.

Day 15



A Cleansing Prayer for Peace in and Across our Borders

God who knows no borders,

We pray for your spirit to pour on us your unifying waters that open our eyes to our unwillingness to welcome the strangers in our land.

We pray that instead of building walls that separate us both physically and spiritually, we will break down the positions that have a hold on us and divide us.

We pray that as we prosper as a nation, we will not forget that we too are strangers in this land. That we once had to rely on you more deeply for our every need.

We pray that we may open our understandings of what it means to dwell in you so that we may welcome the stranger, not as a foreigner, but as an equal.

We pray that we may treat our equals justly, and that we may have the courage to stand up in their defense when no one else will.

Give us your strength, O Lord, to be one body in your name.

Amen.



Written by Hugo Saucedo, Youth Pastor for Western District of MC USA.

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Day 16



Armando and Elena Garcia

One Saturday evening at the home of the Gallegos, as many as 15-20 gathered for a home Bible study. Armando was one of the men present and it was a new experience for him to sing songs like “Alabaré.” He felt comforted to hear of God’s love, and prayer time raised his awareness of God. It was encouraging to meet people who care.

Armando was in the U.S. alone; his wife and two sons were at home in Mexico. He came to improve life for his family and worked in agriculture. He could earn \$7 per hour as compared to \$7 per day in Mexico, which barely covered the cost of food.

Armando has a work permit in the U.S. and returns each year to Mexico to renew the permit. He is usually gone about two months. His employer speaks highly of his work and character and is willing to do what is required each year to get his permit.

His wife, Elena, says it is very hard to be alone with the family. Armando and Elena observe that the arrangement for guest workers separates families, at times causing marital problems and even leading to divorce.

Two years later, Armando brought his wife and two sons to the U.S. For Elena, coming to the U.S. was all about the family being together. “Our lifestyle here is almost like the rich in Mexico, but is poor here,” explains Elena.

PRAYER:

Lord, we thank you for those who have found work here through the guest worker program. We pray for those families that are separated by this arrangement. Teach us how to be true brothers and sisters to these precious people who are working in our industries. Amen.

Day 17

Peter on Being Strangers

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God’s elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galacia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,... Grace and peace be yours in abundance... Since you call on a Father who judges each man’s work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear....

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

— 1 Peter 1:1-2,17; 2:9-12 NIV



Do people who come to our country feel like strangers? Many are Christians. Do we treat them as we would brothers and sisters in Christ?

Christians in the Roman Empire felt like strangers. They suffered from persecution. They felt like citizens of another kingdom without borders. They were to be a “holy nation.”

The Anabaptists felt like aliens and strangers even before they came to America or went to Russia. Their faith put them at odds with the societies of Europe of that day. They often identified themselves with the writings of 1 Peter.

Even today we might not totally “fit” in this country. Can we more easily identify with “aliens” who come here to work? Might we not feel especially called to walk with them in their pilgrimage here?

PRAYER:

Lord, we thank you for making us your people, calling us to be “a holy nation,” making us sometimes feel like strangers in our country. Guide us in our walk with our brothers and sisters who come from other countries, who may also feel like strangers in need of friendship. May grace and peace be theirs in abundance. Amen.

Day 18

Season of Waiting

In this season of waiting,
We light candles
naming the themes we long to embody.

God, may your Spirit
Fill,
Empower,
Enliven,
So that we truly may be signposts of love, joy, hope and peace.

In this season of waiting,
We acknowledge
living the already and not yet tensions of the kingdom.

God, may your Spirit
Strengthen,
Inspire,
Move,
So that your kingdom may come and your will be done.

In this season of waiting,
We notice
evidence of your Spirit at work, among us.

God, may your Spirit
Open
Transform
Illuminate
So that all may dwell in perfect peace. AMEN.



Written by Sherah-Leigh Gerber, Resource Team Coordinator for Ohio Conference.

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Day 19

“Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; but their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditate day and night. They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.” — Psalm 1



One by one the Hispanic mothers came down the stairs, children in arms as well as each bringing a dish of food for the communion table later on. We all gathered around the round table, adding more chairs until we were 12. As the children played contentedly in the next room, the mothers shared their lives and concerns. It was a holy time.

Many gave thanks that their husbands were called back to their jobs again. They shared concerns about family members suffering from the flu. Four of the women were sisters, and they gave thanks that their parents were celebrating 50 years of marriage. *“We get to talk on the phone with them every other day in Mexico. Our father is not well, and it’s hard to be so far away.”*

There was great concern for the recent law passed in Ohio which will not renew car license plates for anyone who does not have permanent residency. *“What will we do? What will become of us? What will that mean for our families, for our children, for our places of work?”*

The women took turns reading scripture, allowing the Word of God to comfort them. The mother who gave birth to her first child five weeks earlier shared that when she went into labor she resolved to keep repeating the verse, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,” in the midst of her labor. She was glad that she had memorized that verse so she could meditate on it during the long hours of labor, far away from her mother.

Prayer: Lord, we thank you for the women who are part of Hispanic Bible studies. Bless those who impact their husbands and children. May Christians continue to grow these ministries. Amen.

Written by Mattie Marie Mast at Salem Mennonite (Wooster), November 2009.

Day 20

Immigrants and the Law

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.... On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animal, nor the alien within your gates.... Do not mistreat an alien or oppress him, for you were aliens in Egypt. — Exodus 20:8-10; 22:21 NIV

For the Lord your God is God of gods ... the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality.... He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt. — Deuteronomy 10:17-19 NIV

Do not take advantage of a hired man who is poor..., whether he is a brother Israelite or an alien living in one of your towns.... When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the alien, the fatherless and the widow. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt. That is why I command you to do this.

— Deuteronomy 24:14, 21-22 NIV



How do we feel about those who come here illegally? As we study immigrants in the Bible are we surprised at how often they are mentioned in the Law? Their rights are not overlooked. They are given rest on the Sabbath. They are not to be mistreated. Strangers are loved by God and to be loved by their hosts.

Almost every time “aliens” are mentioned, the Israelites are reminded of their own history as aliens or slaves. Strangers are not to be taken advantage of or deprived of justice.

Have you heard Christians speak in a disparaging way about the “aliens” among us? Do the immigration laws of our country and the way they are applied always relate to justice and compassion? Are we always ready to defend their cause and critique any laws that are not just?

PRAYER:

Lord, we praise you for the way some of our ancestors were welcomed into this land. Help us to find ways to promote justice for those who seek what our people sought. Help us to love our neighbors as you have loved us. Amen.

Day 21



Prayer for Peace

In you, our Lord Jesus Christ,
We found the North and South
The East and West
Reunited in peace.

Lord, you love diversity and enjoy it
Because you the Creator made it in that way.
You imaged multicolor and multilingual races
The human being with many faces
To praise you Lord, with all those tongues.

Oh Lord you love all races!
Help us to accept the blessing
To have a neighbor who is different
And share with him/her the precious gift of your salvation.

Help us to have an open heart
And let come into our soul
The precious gift of all humanity
Because we are and then... I am



Written by Gilberto Flores, Director of Denominational Ministry and Missional Church for Mennonite Church USA Executive Leadership.

This prayer is reprinted by permission from *PeaceSigns*, a free ezine from Mennonite Church USA Peace and Justice Support Network. To sign up, see www.MennoniteUSA.org/peace.

Day 22

Immigrants Are Welcomed

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

— Romans 12:9-13 NIV

Keep on loving each other as brothers. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering. — Hebrews 13:1-3 NIV



One of the ancient practices of Christians is hospitality, welcoming strangers. Christians made the first hospitals, a word related to hospitality. It is a practice the church dare not give up without losing its character and essence.

Paul calls the Romans to brotherly love, *philadelphia*. He includes in his admonitions hospitality — *philoxenia* — literally, “love to strangers.” The same two words are used in Hebrews 13:1-2 where the writer says that Christians should not forget to entertain (show love to) strangers and adds “for by so doing some have entertained angels without knowing it.”

Do we entertain strangers/immigrants as well as our friends and relatives? As in Matthew 25 prisoners are also mentioned, and those who are mistreated. Do we remember, at least in our prayers, those “aliens” in our prisons?

PRAYER:

Lord, we pray for our government and for a reformation of the immigration system. While we wait we ask you to help us to be hospitable to people from other countries that you send to our neighborhoods. We pray for those in prison, perhaps for just reasons; we also ask for your special blessing on those who may be suffering injustices and mistreatment. Forgive us. Amen.

Day 23

An Ohio Immigrant Family Saga

Rodolfo first came to the U.S. in the 1990s and worked in Oregon and Kansas before coming to Ohio in 2000. Eva became frustrated with struggling with the family alone most of the year and she told Rodolfo, “Take me and the family with you.” So Eva came in 2000, crying as she missed the children she had left at home.

When they had settled, they brought the family from Mexico. Rodolfo took a bus down to Mexico. It was a pleasure to meet their four children: Lupe, Pedro, Flora, and Rosa. Ahead of them lay the adjustments to a strange culture, colder weather, and another language.

With the help and encouragement of teachers, friends, and the church, the children thrived. Lupe was in the National Honor Society. Pedro was a star player for the school soccer team which was first in its district in 2005. Flora has been on the varsity track team for two years. The family regularly participated in the fellowship of the church. Eva was baptized in May 2003.



When Paul and Ann Conrad visited family relatives in Mexico in 2005, they were received graciously. Several of Eva's sisters were sewing soccer balls by hand to earn cash to keep food on the table while waiting for their husbands to send money home from their work in the U.S.

In December of 2009 Eva, Pedro, and Lupe passed their interviews and received their residency cards. They are able to return to visit relatives for Christmas after almost nine years.

PRAYER:

Lord, we thank you that the story of Rodolfo and Eva has good parts to it. We pray for those who have not found easy solutions for their families. Bless the churches that are walking with immigrant families as they face difficult transitions and family separations. Amen.

Day 24

Prayer of Many Questions

God who listens,
What about our church neighborhood--
For Rent signs going up
as undocumented neighbors give up and go back
defeated, to even worse poverty than they have experienced here?

What do you have in mind for us to do and be among them?
What is our part in their struggle to be here
to get just enough or to also have their chance
at this American dream?

God of compassion
also be to us the God of courage and of wisdom.

For we do not like to admit our sense of powerlessness
in the face of bureaucracy
in the face of pragmatism.

We do not like to acknowledge our fear
of what real involvement might cost us.

God of longsuffering
Work in us compassion
Work in us mercy
Work in us sacrifice
Bring home to us
In all ways
Who is our neighbor.



Written by Beki Linsenmeyer, part of North Goshen Mennonite, a congregation that is working at cross-cultural ministry in a neighborhood with many Hispanics. This prayer grows out of her concern for her neighbors.

This prayer is reprinted by permission from *PeaceSigns*, a free ezine from Mennonite Church USA Peace and Justice Support Network. To sign up, see www.MennoniteUSA.org/peace.

Day 25

Immigrants, Naomi and Ruth

In the day when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. The man's name was Elimelech, his wife's name Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion....

Now Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, both Mahlon and Kilion also died....

When [Naomi] heard in Moab that the Lord had come to the aid of her people by providing food for them, Naomi and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there.... Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the Lord show kindness to you, as you have shown to your dead and to me....

Then she kissed them and they wept aloud and said to her, "We will go back with you to your people." — Ruth 1:1-10 NIV



As we have seen before, immigration can occur because of the lack of jobs and food in one's home country. That is the case with Naomi. She and her family leave Judah because of a famine. They find a way to live in Moab, which is not always a friendly country. Her sons even find wives there.

But unfortunately all three men die. Ruth, who has welcomed Naomi to Moab, decides to be an immigrant in Naomi's country. There she finds that she has rights, and she is soon married to a relative of her deceased husband.

Could this story have been written at a time when some did not want to welcome foreign wives? Ruth the foreigner is the great-grandmother of King David. She is included along with other foreign women in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus.

PRAYER: Lord, we marvel at your justice for all peoples. Help us to recognize the rights of immigrants to our country. We praise you for the contributions they make to our church, our society, and our heritage. Amen.

Day 26

Daniel, an Immigrant

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand....

Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring in some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility — young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians.... They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service.

Among them were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah....

But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself in this way.

— Daniel 1:1-8 NIV



Not all immigrants that come to our country end up doing jobs that no one else will do. Some become skilled workers and professionals. In these ways also they have a significant positive impact on our economy and society.

Daniel, even though he is obligated to immigrate, lives an interesting life in a foreign land. He is a captive in exile and could become a common slave like many others. Stories in other chapters of Daniel tell us how he comes to be recognized in Babylon for his wisdom and faith.

Some immigrants are able to find work because they are hard workers. Others are able to find their way into positions of power. Do we appreciate all the ways in which immigrants are contributing to our society? Or have we developed prejudices because a few have become criminals?

PRAYER:

Lord, we remember some of the forces that brought many of our ancestors to this country. We are grateful for the freedom we now find here. Help us to empathize with others who come now to find a new life and to make their contribution. Amen.

Day 27

An Immigrant in Prison

In February 2004, there was a drug bust in Wayne County. Four Mexican men were picked up and charged with trafficking in cocaine. Jorge was considered the leader and was given a six-year prison sentence. Jorge had been a friend to Raúl Tadéo, so Raúl visited him and the other men at the Wooster jail.

Bibles were given to the four men, but Jorge could not read or write. One of the other men began to teach him to read with the use of the Bible. With this help, Jorge began to learn to read, teaching himself. The others who had shorter sentences left the prison some years ago. Jorge and his companion eventually gave their lives to the Lord. Raúl continued to visit Jorge around twice a month and mails Bible studies to him regularly. He can see that Jorge is not the same man that went into the prison.

Jorge is due to complete his six-year prison term in February 2010. He once told Raúl that if he had not been sent to prison he would likely be dead by now because of the evil life he was leading as a troublemaker. He can now thank the Lord for his time in prison, where he learned to read and to write and where he learned about God and Christ. He recognizes now that this prison term was a blessing sent from God.

He has experienced a number of miracles while in prison. He has tried to share the Gospel with others. He once told Raúl, "I am here surrounded by walls. I am considered a prisoner. But I know that Jesus Christ has made me a free man."

Prayer: Lord, we thank you for those who find Christ through the ministries that welcome immigrants. Continue to transform lives that make your kingdom a reality in our country and in the countries to which some are deported. Give us a vision of what you can do through us to save people.



Day 28



An Immigrant's Situation

“José” is a Mexican who came to the United States 11 years ago, trying to find better work opportunities. He is an active member of St. Mary’s Catholic Church in Wooster, Ohio. His wife is active in a women’s Bible study at Salem Mennonite Church of Wooster.

Here, with his wife and a child who came from Mexico some years later, they started to raise a family. They had three children who are American citizens. José works in a pallet factory to provide for his family.

In November of 2009, when he was driving to Wooster with his family, he was stopped by a sheriff deputy for driving over the speed limit. Because of some document problems he was taken to jail. His wife was left in the car with the four children, ages 1 to 12. Two hours later, she was able to get someone to pick them up.

Immigration was called, and José ended up in a court in Cleveland, expecting deportation. The judge decided to give him another hearing and released him on bail three days later. His day in court was to come six months later.

What will happen to his wife and children if he gets deported? Three of the children are U.S. citizens without Mexican documentation. One can hardly imagine the fear with which many families like Jose’s live with. The situation for illegal immigrants can be very difficult. Legal visas take many years to obtain.

PRAYER:

Lord, we pray for persons like José and his family. We see their desire to find God’s answers for their lives. Grant them mercy. May they find persons who are sympathetic and can help them to move forward with a good life for their family. Amen.

Day 29

MCC U.S. Immigration Policy

The Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office is a Mennonite and Brethren in Christ presence on Capitol Hill, providing and encouraging prophetic witness to the way Christ on matters of U.S. public policy (www.mcc.org/us/washington).

What is MCC U.S. saying to our government about immigration policy?

Below is a summary of the principles:

1. Pass legislation that provides the option of earned legal status for undocumented immigrants currently living the United States.
2. Maintain the current family-based immigration system and increase the number of available family visas so families can reunite and immigrate together.
3. Create fair and just guest worker programs that ensure labor rights, employer choice and opportunities for immigrant workers to change status.
4. Preserve access to Social Security, health care and other benefits and services for lawfully present immigrants, while avoiding policies that deter access to public services by immigrant communities.
5. Enact oversight mechanisms to support community security, accountability and rights on the border, while opposing policies that contribute to deaths on the border and that create fear among immigrant communities.
6. Address political instability and economic disparity in migrants’ home countries.



PRAYER:

Lord, we pray for the Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office. Bless them in their prophetic witness. Give them wisdom as our representatives. May the way of Christ truly impact our government in immigration policy reform. Amen.



The Challenge

Take a few moments to reflect on these readings from the past month.

- What stands out to you?
- What have you learned?
- What questions do you have?
- What steps can you take to demonstrate love for your neighbor?
- What is God asking of you?



**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,**

**your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.**

Give us today our daily bread.

**Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.**

**Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen.**

Additional Resources



- *Loving Strangers as Ourselves: Biblical Reflections*
An MCC resource for small groups or personal study
- *Strangers in the Land*
A six-week devotional guide on immigration, the Church, and the Bible from the editors of *Sojourners* magazine based on the book, *Christians at the Border* by M. Daniel Carroll R.
- *Welcoming the Stranger: Christians and Immigration*
A discussion guide from the editors of *Sojourners* magazine
- 'I was a stranger and you welcome me...'
Sermon resources on immigration based on Matthew 25:35, a project of *Sojourners*
- *The Road to Emmaus, Second Mile*
A peace journey for congregations, Pathway C, Faith and Life Resources
- *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible*
by Daniel M. Carroll R.
- *The Immigration Crisis: Immigrants, Aliens & the Bible*
by James Karl Hoffmeier, Crossway Books, 2009.
- *Dying to Live: A Migrant's Journey*
Groody River Films, 2007 (33 minutes).
Explores places of conflict, pain and home along the U.S.-Mexico border.
- <http://immigration.mcc.org/>
- www.mennoniteusa.org/Home/Members/ChurchwidePriorities/StrangersNoMore/tabid/112/Default.aspx
- www.peace.mennolink.org/articles/strangerland.html

