



About This Issue Guide

The purpose of this issue guide is to help us talk productively about a difficult issue that concerns all of us.

Deliberation & Discernment

It's not a debate. It's not a contest. It's not even about reaching agreement or seeing eye-to-eye. It's about looking for a shared direction, guided by our faith in God and what we, as God's children, most value.

It's about examining the costs and consequences of possible solutions to daunting problems and finding out what we, as a society – faithful followers and citizens – would or would not accept as a solution.

COMING TO AMERICA. WHO SHOULD WE WELCOME? WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

A Faith-Based Community Deliberative Issue



Introduction

The United States was founded and built by newcomers—men and women arriving from other parts of the world, often with little more than a suitcase and a dream of a new life. For centuries, the steady influx of hardworking and talented people from other countries has helped make America what it is today.

But successive waves of immigration have also raised questions about the need for limits. Some people are concerned that immigration—both legal and illegal—poses risks to national security, increases competition for jobs, and works against our sense of a common identity as Americans. Others believe we need to ask ourselves basic questions about which immigrants we should welcome and how to make the system fairer, more efficient, more secure, and better for our own economy. Some people hold that America must remain open and welcoming to all sorts of people, and that diversity is essential for our society to thrive.



Religious organizations have a long history in helping immigrants become a part of the American religious experiment. The Catholic Relief Collection, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services, Church World Service, World Relief and Episcopal Migration Ministries are several prominently recognized agencies. A prominent evangelical church leader is quoted as saying, "They

are us," because immigrant congregations account for a fast-growing segment of the evangelical church movement.

This fundamental value is reflected in the religious organizations' work with immigrants, refugees, and undocumented immigrants. One scholar called religious organizations the "spiritual first responders" to those affected by immigration issues. Evangelical as well as mainline Christian denominations, Jewish groups, and the Muslim Public Affairs Council have all rallied to influence immigration reform legislation.

When discussing immigration, it is important to understand that those who come to the United States fall into distinct categories. Immigrants choose to resettle in a new country after legally applying for immigrant status and being granted documentation. Refugees are forced to leave their country due to political adversity and seek asylum in a host country. Undocumented immigrants are those who overstay their visitation visas or sneak across the border. The fundamental reason for many who seek residency in the United States is to improve opportunities for their children.

Addressing the immigration dilemma requires that we move beyond polarizing rhetoric and think about what kinds of policies are fair and just. The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy affects nearly 800,000 young people. The U.S. Congress has been considering a comprehensive immigration policy for decades. "A 2016 Gallup poll found that 72 percent of Americans considered immigration a "good thing" for the United States, and as many as 84 percent supported a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants." (Council on Foreign Relations)

One Effective Way to Hold a Faith-based Community Deliberative Forum

1. Welcome & Prayer

The convener or moderator introduces the topic to be deliberated and offers a prayer to “center” those gathered.

2. Sharing Personal Concerns

Participants briefly share their personal concerns about the issue and reflect on God’s will.

3. Deliberation

Participants examine all the options. An approximately equal amount of time should be spent on each option.

4. Reflection

Review the conversation as a group, identifying any areas of common ground or agreement as well as issues that must still be worked through. Allow enough time for this.

5. Questionnaire

Participants complete a questionnaire.

Forum Ground Rules

- Be in prayer and seek the Spirit’s guidance.
- Follow the Golden Rule.
- Speak honestly for yourself by using “I” language.
- Listen to understand. Keep an open mind and heart.
- Disagree respectfully with others’ ideas.



This issue guide presents three options for moving forward, each rooted in a different way of looking at the issue and a different set of examples about what could be done. **Strengthen America's tradition** of welcoming newcomers; **Impose stricter limits** on who may emigrate; **Reinforce our common bonds** by subscribing to America's purpose and unity. None of these options is more "correct" than the others and each one has drawbacks that need to be taken into account if we are to make progress on this issue. They are presented here not as ready-made solutions but rather as a starting point for weighing the options and identifying possible solutions.

Discernment and Deliberation

For more than thirty years the Kettering Foundation and National Issues Forums Institute have produced resources to engage citizens in civil discourse around a host of public issues. Many of the issues – wealth and poverty, immigration, criminal justice, education, and health care among others – are reflected in religious organizations teaching documents and formal resolutions that inform their adherents.

In the deliberative dialogue process, conveners and neutral moderators bring small groups of people together to share their perspectives, both heart-felt and intellectual, with the expectation that listening to different opinions will help groups move toward common ground or judgments that can subsequently be shared with community decision-makers.

In religious communities, communal discernment has similar objectives. Contrasted to an individual's spiritual discernment and prayer life, communal discernment asks the faithful to prayerfully consult their sacred texts, discern divine wisdom, and discuss personal perspectives in order to collectively arrive at decisions. Once more, discernment can be valued as an ongoing process to reflect upon ministry decisions and actions and make adjustments as needed.

Beginning the Forum

Participants are encouraged to briefly – in a sentence or two – share some personal, from-the-heart concerns by responding to one of the following questions:

As a child of God, what makes this issue real for you?
Why are you concerned?

How might you discern how God views the challenges of immigrants, refugees, and American citizens?



Option One: Strengthen America's Immigrant Traditions

Immigration has helped make America what it is today—a dynamic and diverse culture, an engine of the global economy, and a beacon of freedom around the world. We need to stay true to our values as a nation of immigrants by welcoming new arrivals, attracting the best and brightest from other nations, and protecting those seeking refuge from war and persecution.

America has long been defined as a nation of immigrants. We are a diverse people bound together by a common vision of freedom and opportunity. We need an immigration policy that builds on that tradition, one that welcomes newcomers, helps immigrant families stay together, and protects those fleeing from war and oppression. Welcoming immigrants is not only the right thing to do it benefits our culture and our economy. To remain competitive in a fast-changing global marketplace, the United States needs newcomers who are willing to contribute their talents to strengthening America's culture of ingenuity and entrepreneurship. At the same time, we need to uphold existing immigration laws and create an acceptable way for the millions of undocumented immigrants in the U.S. to earn the right to citizenship.



But there are costs associated with welcoming large numbers of immigrants. They may pose a threat to national security, stiffen competition for jobs, strain the public purse, and compromise our sense of common identity.

Hospitality is a core value held by the world's religions, particularly those of the Abrahamic traditions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Religious leaders use sacred texts and stories to sustain ancient practices. Offering hospitality is a moral imperative in Hebrew scripture. Jesus helped people realize that when he was welcomed into peoples' homes the tables turned and the guest become the host thus reflecting the holiness of everyone. Muslims are urged to go the extra mile when welcoming strangers by anticipating their needs for food and shelter.

There are many faith-based programs that help newcomers to the United States. Welcome Mat Detroit is affiliated with Global Detroit and supports immigrants and aspiring entrepreneurs by providing resources, training, and networking. The International Institute of Connecticut sponsors a New American Micro-Loan Program. Nonprofit agencies throughout the nation have a variety of resources to help immigrants establish homes and jobs. Stories of immigrants' successful assimilation into American society, especially by second and third generations family members, are numerous. Investing in future leaders and entrepreneurs contributes to the nation's vitality.

EXAMPLES OF WHAT COULD BE DONE	TRADE-OFFS
Clear the backlog of immigrants currently waiting to get into the country and streamline the process by which qualified applicants are granted visas.	Hastening the process gives less time for background checks and other safeguards.
Allow the estimated 11 million immigrants living in the U.S. without legal papers to pay a fine and back taxes, but stay in the U.S. and eventually become citizens.	This rewards those who entered the country illegally while penalizing those who have pursued a legal route to citizenship. It might also drive up unlawful immigration.
Accept more refugees fleeing war and deprivation in countries like Syria. We have a moral obligation to help.	Millions of Americans are in need too, and it's difficult to vet people coming from war-torn areas.
Attract more high-skilled professionals from other countries by expanding the number of H-1B temporary visas granted each year.	This could put American professionals at a disadvantage in the job market and allow employers to pay lower wages.
Provide legal residency and the ability to apply for citizenship to "DREAMers"—undocumented immigrants brought to the U.S. as young children.	It's not fair to allow this group to benefit from the illegal actions of their families.

Option Two: Impose Stricter Limits. Keep Our Country Safe



High levels of immigration put our society and national security at risk. We need tougher immigration laws—and much tougher enforcement of existing laws—for new arrivals, legal and illegal alike. We must also strengthen our commitment to border security, crack down on visa overstay, and introduce more stringent measures to deal with immigrants living outside the law.

The United States was founded as “a nation of laws, not of men.” Yet, when it comes to immigration, we currently do a poor job of

enforcing those laws. This leaves us vulnerable to terrorists and other criminals entering the country undetected and it compromises our national security. According to this option, by failing to stem the tide of illegal immigration, we have encouraged a system of widespread neglect and abuse and added to some of America’s most serious social and economic troubles, including poverty, overburdened schools, and stagnating wages for American workers. . We need tighter control of our borders, stronger enforcement of immigration laws, and stricter limits on the number of immigrants admitted into the country.

But this option has drawbacks. Walling off our neighbors to the South and restricting immigration from abroad may fuel anti-American sentiment, keep families apart, and deprive American businesses of much-needed workers.

People belonging to faith communities share concerns for safety and security. In the United States, religious organizations from across the theological spectrum are speaking about immigration. More than 200 evangelical leaders signed a statement advocating immigration reform with three specific policy goals: 1 Make it harder to immigrate or work unlawfully; 2 Make it easier to immigrate lawfully; 3 Allow those who are currently present unlawfully to earn the chance to get right with the law. United Methodists, United Church of Christ, and Presbyterian Church (USA) have issued similar public statements.

People feel that we cannot take on everybody's problem, even when we remain committed to honoring our heritage as a country of immigration. American religious organizations, including Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and Muslim benefit from having relationships with their counterparts in other nations. For example, religious relief groups collaborate to address natural disasters. Religious organizations have opportunities to contribute to other nations' safety and security.

One of the core values in the Abrahamic religions is obedience. Jewish, Christian, and Muslim sacred texts describe God's expectations of humans. All three religions respect the authority of the Ten Commandments. The Commandments speak to caring for family and neighbor and more specifically, how to order society in a peaceful and respectful manner.

EXAMPLES OF WHAT COULD BE DONE	TRADE-OFFS
Construct a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border to limit the number of immigrants entering the country illegally. Step up security along our borders by hiring more patrol agents and customs officials.	This is likely to drive more activity underground and increase violence.
Require police officers to check a person's immigration status if there is reasonable suspicion.	Many police officials say this hampers law enforcement by making immigrants afraid of the police. It could also lead to racial profiling.
Establish tracking systems to prevent tourists and students from overstaying their visas, and banning those from Syria and other countries known for harboring terrorists.	This could close the door to refugees fleeing from war and oppression and discourage people from around the world from visiting and studying in our country.
Crack down on "sanctuary cities" that refuse to cooperate with federal immigration agents seeking to locate and deport undocumented immigrants.	Increased fear of deportation would hurt families and communities, undermine local police, and drive many undocumented immigrants underground.
Prosecute employers if they knowingly hire workers without legal papers.	Without undocumented immigrants who carry out low-skilled work, the prices we pay will rise.

Option Three: Reinforce Our Common Bonds

High levels of immigration are straining our ability to welcome newcomers and absorb them into American society. This is undermining our sense of common identity. We need a measured immigration policy—one that prioritizes assimilation, economic security, healthy communities, and shared values—to ensure that we don't lose the common ideals that bind us together as a people.

The currency in our pockets and purses says *e pluribus unum*, "From the many, one." This motto reflects a persistent challenge facing any diverse nation of immigrants—that of finding unity in the midst of diversity. Newcomers have stimulated our economy and strengthened our culture in the past. Today, the high rate of immigration places stress on our sense of shared purpose and common identity as Americans. The primary goal of America's immigration policy should be assimilation: to put America first and strengthen what we have in common, not meet labor shortages or solve the world's problems. This means reducing the number of admissions, emphasizing integration, and making sure that we can accommodate newcomers without losing the shared values that define who we are as a people.



This option might undercut the vibrancy and diversity that makes America a beacon to the world. It could discourage high-skilled professionals from other countries from contributing to the American economy. Rather than celebrating the distinctive customs and traditions that immigrants bring to our country, with this option we could tend to suppress them.

Faith communities help newcomers assimilate. A new member's satisfaction and spiritual health is aided by a strong sense of belonging. Likewise, religious institutions can play an important role in assisting refugees and immigrants assimilate into American society. In the period following the Vietnam War where significant numbers of Southeast Asian immigrants escaped war-ravaged communities and fled to the United States, faith communities and their members helped immigrants find housing, employment, education and become self sufficient.

Beginning in 1975 and in each following decade Southeast Asian immigrants doubled in number. By 2014 1.3 Vietnamese immigrants settled in the United States. Currently, a similar migration of people from seven Middle East nations is taking place. In 2016, 43,000 of 96,800 global refugees and 52,000 of the 1.1 million legal immigrants arrived from these countries.

EXAMPLES OF WHAT COULD BE DONE	TRADE-OFFS
Require that immigrants speak English and learn about American history and government. Set up mandatory English-language courses for new arrivals.	Many immigrants—especially older ones—will not be able to do this quickly. Are we willing to turn them away or deport them?
Immediately reduce the number of legal immigrants allowed into the United States. We need to take things slower by restricting family reunification to spouses and minor children, for example	Reducing immigration levels deprives our economy of workers we need and harms immigrant families who will not be able to bring other family members into the country.
Adjust immigration quotas based on the strength of the economy so immigrants don't displace American workers in the job market.	Most Americans don't want the tough, low-wage jobs immigrants often do.
Ban certain customs—such as arranged marriages and the wearing of veils or burqas—to emphasize American values like equality for women.	Giving people the right to live and dress as they like is at the very heart of our country. This violates what we stand for.
Eliminate the right to dual citizenship, which allows some to retain legal and political allegiances to a second country.	Immigrants may choose never to embrace American citizenship if it means cutting ties to their home country.

Reflection, Agreement, and Next Steps?

After deliberating through each of the approaches and considering many of the specific actions and corresponding tradeoffs, encourage the participants to discern some common ground. In this final portion of the forum participants will transition from sharing personal opinions to seeking agreement on what can be done as a congregation about the opioid epidemic. Use several of the following questions to determine any common ground.

1. Can we detect any shared sense of direction or any agreement?
2. What did you hear the group saying about tensions in this issue?
3. Are there any particular values we hold in common?
4. Are there next steps we might want to take?
5. What do we still need to talk about?
6. Who else needs to be here? What voices were missing?

Coming to America: Who Should We Welcome? What Should We Do?

This discussion material is adapted from an earlier issue guide with the permission of the National Issues Forums. It is intended to encourage productive participation of faith-based perspectives in public deliberation on the issue of end-of-life choices. This material is based on research done by a group of clergy and scholars from a wide range of Christian denominations who have participated in research exchanges with the Kettering Foundation.

Kettering Foundation

Founded in 1927, the Kettering Foundation of Dayton Ohio (with an office in Washington, DC), is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research institute that studies the public's role in democracy. It provides issue guides and other research for the National Issues Forums. For information about the Kettering Foundation, please, visit www.kettering.org or contact the foundation at 200 Commons Road, Dayton, Ohio 45459.

Baylor University Public Deliberation Initiative

Baylor University's Public Deliberation Initiative (PDI) collaborates with the Kettering Foundation by participating in regular research exchanges focused on developing faith-based materials for public deliberation. PDI also contributes to this work by hosting the Faith & Deliberation Initiative on its website. For more information about Baylor University's PDI and for access to discussion materials visit <https://sites.baylor.edu/baylorpdi/>

National Issues Forums Institute

National Issues Forums Institute (NIFI) coordinates a network of civic, education, and other organizations and individuals whose common interest is to promote public deliberation in America.

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