

USING YOUR VOICE:

For Our Immigrant Neighbors



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FIRST THINGS FIRST

From the earliest days of this nation, our country has continued to ask, *who and what makes a U.S. citizen?* And while our nation has stumbled and struggled to accurately define and defend the various answers proposed to this question, as Christians, we know our most important citizenship is the one we have in heaven. Our care for others is not simply defined or defended by an earthly, isolated constitution or any temporary legislation, but by the word of God and what it says about human beings.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them. Genesis 1:26-27 (NIV)

So, if we believe that each and every person, U.S. citizen or not, is made in the image and likeness of God, everything we think, feel, and voice about human beings should be held captive by our desire to honor God and his image.

A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. Luke 6:45 (NIV)

We hold fast to the deep belief about the dignity and sanctity of every human life, striving to love our neighbors as we would love our own families, as commanded by Jesus himself in the Gospels.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' ^[a] ³¹ *The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'* ^[b] *There is no commandment greater than these. Mark 12:30-31 (NIV)*

Our faith in Jesus and our desire to be more like him paves a distinct path through any hard conversation or public policy. A path that compels us to show up well, confidently use our voices, and defend the vulnerable and weary among us.

Immigrants and refugees are some of the most vulnerable and weary among us.

Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy. Proverbs 31:8-9 (NIV)

And while immigration is an incredibly complex subject, with endless headlines and discouraging rabbit trails, there is a place for your voice in this space. You don't need to be an immigration expert to confidently use your voice for your immigrant neighbor.

Our confidence is not rooted in our public policy expertise or knowledge of immigration law. It is anchored in scripture. While the Bible has nothing to say about U.S. immigration policy, it does have so very much to say (in the Old and New Testament) about God's heart for immigrants and how his people are to protect and provide for them.

To be clear, our compassion in this space is not political, it's meant to be prophetic.

- Watch this [short video](#) with Jenny Yang to learn what the Bible says about immigrants and refugees.
- Another great resource is Women of Welcome's free Bible study, [What Does the Bible Say About Immigration?](#)
- Tune in [here](#) to a full conversation about immigration with [LaTasha Morrison](#) & [Bri Stensrud](#) on the Be the Bridge podcast ([episode 288](#)).

May this guide continue to attach confidence to your compassion.

HOW DO YOU START USING YOUR VOICE IN THIS SPACE?

While knowing the heart of God for immigrants is foundational, it does help to have answers about some of the most common questions. So many of these hard conversations can get complicated, fast, so here's something to keep in mind during any interaction:

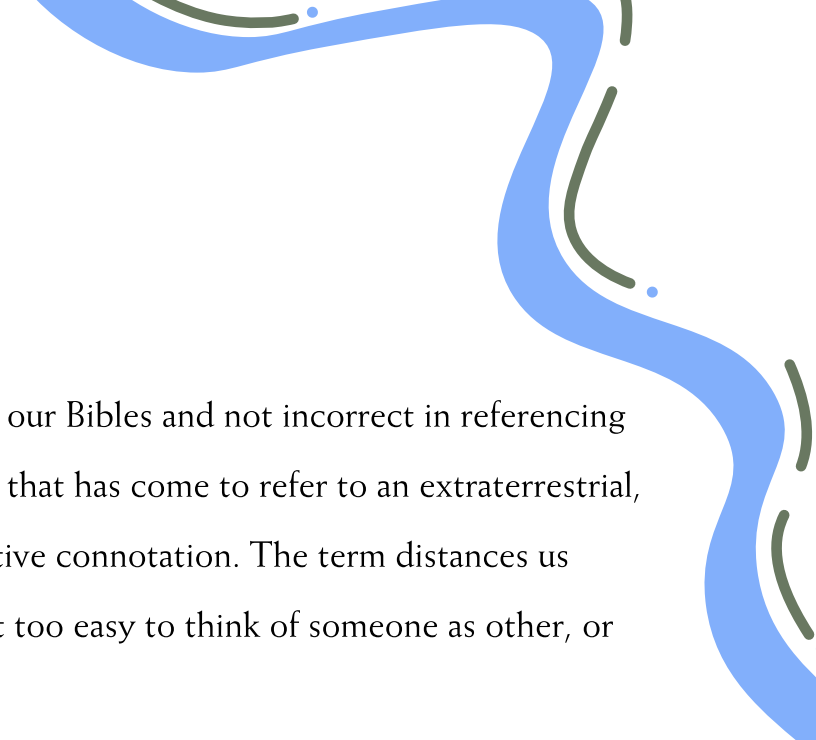
We don't have to sacrifice safety and security to ensure humane treatment of people.

Everyone wants safe and secure borders, thorough vetting, and a community where they can feel peace and safety.

But as Christians, what should set us and our advocacy apart is an uncompromising accountability to the humane treatment of people, regardless of how they entered this country. We want people to follow the law, we need violent offenders off our streets, but we should also be a nation that inspires and models a humane way forward in this space.

Humanizing Language

In our effort to show up and use our voice well, how we talk about and refer to those made in the image and likeness of God is important. It can be confusing because our U.S. policies, and even some of our Bible translations, might use words that are accurate in their context and definition, and yet don't help us (in today's context and cultural meaning) refer to people in the most humane ways. If we can talk about our neighbor, whom we are commanded to love as ourselves in more dignifying ways, we should make every effort to do so.



Alien is a great example of this.

While the word is correctly translated in our Bibles and not incorrect in referencing a foreigner or noncitizen, it's also a term that has come to refer to an extraterrestrial, nonhuman life and usually carries a negative connotation. The term distances us from the humanity of a person, making it too easy to think of someone as other, or not like us.

We have better, more humanizing words we can use instead, like **immigrant**, **refugee**, or **asylum seeker**. Using the term **undocumented immigrant** or **immigrant without status** should always be used instead of calling someone illegal.

Here's why: The action a person committed may be illegal, and it should be called as such, but we shouldn't be calling or referring to another human being as illegal. We should always choose the most humanizing terms.

If we can do better, as Christians, we should.

Humanizing words and phrases don't dilute the truth; if anything, precise language elevates the truth (of any situation or people group), and much of that is helped by using people-first language.

**Excerpt from Start with Welcome book page xiii*

HELPFUL TERMS

Immigration: The act of traveling into a country for the purpose of permanent residence there.

Immigrant: Someone who leaves his or her home country and moves to a foreign country with the intention of settling there.

Migrant: Someone who is moving from place to place (either within his or her country or across borders).

Refugee: Someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of a well-founded fear of persecution on account of their nationality, race, religion, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

Asylum seeker: Someone who has fled his or her home country and, upon arrival in the country where they hope to be allowed to stay, professes a fear of persecution in their country of origin on account of specific factors such as their nationality, race, religion, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion — but whose refugee status hasn't been legally adjudicated yet.

COMMON QUESTIONS

Why Don't People Just Immigrate Legally?

The legal pathways to permanent residence in the U.S. are extremely limited. For most, there's simply no "line" to get in. There are essentially four main pathways to legally immigrate to the U.S. that all come with long waits, big expenses, and confusing out-of-date systems.

- BLOOD: Immigrants with a close family member who is a U.S. citizen or Lawful Permanent Resident can apply. Currently, this process can take more than 20 years.
- SWEAT: Some employers can sponsor immigrants. To qualify, you almost always need an advanced degree or an extraordinary ability that allows an employer to legally sponsor you. In total, there are approximately 144,000 work visas each year for noncitizens wanting to live here permanently.
- TEARS: A small percentage of those coming to the U.S. (refugees and asylum seekers) have proven that they fled (a legal definition of) persecution on account of their race, religion, national origin, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. Unlike other pathways, the Refugee Resettlement Program's annual numerical allowance is set by a Presidential determination every year (not by Congress).

**This pathway has currently been indefinitely suspended by the current administration.*

- LUCK: The diversity lottery randomly selects applicants from "under-represented" countries, who do not have as many nationals living in the U.S.

Current estimates suggest that approximately 11.7 million undocumented immigrants are living in the United States. 42% of those here without authorization (4.5 million) are individuals who have overstayed their legal visas.

COMMON QUESTIONS



What is the U.S. Vetting Process for Migrants?

The simple answer: thorough.

We fully affirm and support these important efforts to ensure that no one who seeks to do harm is able to enter the United States. It's important for the government to know who is coming in and out of the country.

There are several vetting processes, and each one depends on which immigration avenue someone comes through. Fortunately, while the specific processes vary depending on which path an individual enters through, all visitors and immigrants who are lawfully admitted to the United States undergo a vetting process. Anyone lawfully entering the U.S. (including asylum seekers at the southern border) is first subjected to background checks to ensure they are not ineligible for entry or a known threat to public safety.

The small percentage of the world's refugees that the U.S. selects to resettle here (less than 1%) are subjected to the most thorough vetting process of any immigrant or visitor. The process can take years and is coordinated between the U.S. Departments of Homeland Security, State, and Defense, as well as the National Counterterrorism Center and the FBI. Refugees go through multiple in-person interviews, biographic and biometric background checks, and a health screening before being allowed to enter the U.S.

How do we know this system works? We have data.

Since the Refugee Act was passed in 1980, no American lives have ever been lost in an Islamic terrorist attack perpetrated by someone who came through the U.S. refugee resettlement program. The United States has a strong history of being both pro-security and pro-compassion.

COMMON QUESTIONS

Do Immigrants Take Away Jobs From American Workers?

Immigrants actually tend to flock to industries where there is a need for workers – and currently, the United States has a high need for workers!

When the U.S. labor market has a need that American workers can't or won't fill, immigrants can move to fill in those jobs.

When immigrants enter the United States workforce, it actually benefits the economy and raises the GDP. Not only do immigrant incomes rise, but American incomes rise, too. The Bush Institute explains that this “immigration surplus” amounts to an additional \$36-73 billion dollars flowing to Americans each year.

Even those who came under difficult humanitarian parole circumstances, like Afghans and Ukrainians, are also positive contributors to the economy!

COMMON QUESTIONS

What Benefits do Immigrants Qualify for?

Undocumented immigrants cannot receive most federal means-tested public benefits, such as SNAP (food stamps), regular Medicaid, and Supplemental Security Income.

While a few states and localities provide some support for undocumented immigrants, such as access to health insurance programs for children, most do not. Most people cannot receive federal benefits for many years after coming to the U.S.

There are a few exceptions for refugees, asylees (those who have been granted asylum), and a few other categories. Asylees and refugees are sometimes eligible for cash and medical assistance for a limited time, though their eligibility may vary depending upon their state and on their income levels. They can also apply for social services like Medicaid and SNAP.

A study of resettled refugees found that the costs associated with their presence were greater than their fiscal contributions for the first several years they were in the US. However, twenty years after arrival, the average refugee adult had contributed \$21,000 more in taxes than the total cost of any government spending on their behalf.

COMMON QUESTIONS



Do Undocumented Immigrants Pay Taxes? Aren't They Just a Drain on our System?

Immigrants with and without legal status pay taxes and in so doing, contribute to Medicare and Social Security. Most economists believe they actually contribute more than they receive!

Undocumented immigrants do not have access to most welfare benefits, and even lawful immigrants usually have to wait five years before they can apply for benefits. (An example of a benefit an undocumented person may be eligible for would be treatment in a hospital emergency room in a dire situation.)

It's interesting to know that immigrants are less likely to use welfare benefits than native-born Americans.

COMMON QUESTIONS



Do Undocumented Immigrants Commit More Crimes?

Crime is crime, no matter who commits it. Our legal system should seek justice for all victims. That said, most immigrants are not violent nor involved with gangs. So many of them have fled communities that have been destroyed by these kinds of activities, and desire a community that respects law and order.

Did you know immigrants are less likely to be incarcerated than native-born Americans?

In Texas, for example, US-born citizens are twice as likely to be arrested for a violent crime, 2.5 times more likely to be arrested for drug crimes, and over 4 times more likely to be arrested for property crimes! Most immigrants come to the U.S. to pursue educational and economic opportunities, and have little to gain by committing crimes as the consequences can be much greater (deportation), affecting their future and the future of their families.

President Trump's former Chief of Staff John Kelly said, "The vast majority of the people that move illegally into the United States are not bad people. They're not criminals. They're not [a part of] MS-13."¹

COMMON QUESTIONS

What is the Connection Between Race and Immigration?

On the surface, race and immigration may seem like completely different subjects. But when we take a look at how our country's immigration system was formed, we quickly learn how deeply embedded race and ethnicity were- and continue to be- in our immigration policies and allowances.

Two helpful resources:

- WoW Video: Immigration & Race with Kathryn Freeman
- BTB Academy videos: History & White Supremacy



COMMON QUESTIONS



What Does “Comprehensive Immigration Reform” Look Like?

We join with the *Evangelical Immigration Table* in advocating for an updated immigration system that would:

- Protect the rule of law
- Guarantee secure national borders
- Ensure fairness to taxpayers
- Respect the God-given dignity of every person
- Establish a path towards legal status and/or citizenship for those who qualify and wish to become permanent residents

We also believe that it’s important for someone who has previously broken immigration law to be able to make restitution and return to good standing. Undocumented immigrants desire an opportunity to reconcile with the law.

Currently, there is no path forward for them to adjust their status legally and remain in the country in the vast majority of cases. Having a restitution-based immigration pathway could be a solution for immigrants in these situations.

HARD CONVERSATIONS

How do I Have Hard Conversations With People I Disagree With?

While hard conversations can be uncomfortable, they are often healthy and helpful to bring about change in people's hearts and communities.

Before every difficult conversation, start with prayer.

Ask the Lord to give you a peaceful heart and a discerning ear. Invite the Holy Spirit to be active in your life and in the life of the person you're attempting to have a conversation with.

The goal is not necessarily to agree on everything, but to meet the other person where they're at, to intentionally find areas of common ground to build from in future, ongoing conversations.

Listen to this [conversation with Bri Stensrud & Latasha Morrison](#) about where to start and how to do this well.

TALKING TO CHURCH LEADERS



How do I Talk to my Pastor or Church Leadership About Speaking Up?

Whenever we've been personally affected by something or we have been newly educated on issue, it's appropriate and right to share that experience, truth, and education with others, especially those who shepherd the Church.

It's important to remember, that you a part of a Body of believers and everyone has a role to play in bringing truth to the surface and igniting the passion of new ministry. Often times lasting change doesn't come from a single sermon series on the stage, but from the purposeful pursuit of Jesus from the people in the pews.

Before approaching church leadership, be intentional about being prepared and knowing your own heart and personal capacity:

- Am I in a good "heart space" to have a truthful and honoring conversation?
- Am I prepared (not an expert) to have a fruitful conversation?
- What are my expectations walking into a meeting like this? What am I asking the pastor to do?
- What am I asking the pastor/leadership to do with the information I'm sharing?
- Do you have any resources/materials you can leave with your pastor for him to digest or pass along to other staff?
- If asked, would I be willing to take the lead in helping serve or bring about change in this space?

Before the meeting:

- Pray for your words and your time together.
- Pray for the pastor's heart, to be able to receive the information
- Send information (articles, resources, questions) ahead of time so your pastor has time to think through, review, or talk with other staff for guidance.
- Determine to show up well.
- Be prepared to serve.
- Manage your own expectations.
 - This may be the first time your pastor has been asked to address this challenging topic and it can be humbling and/or intimidating.
 - If the leadership doesn't agree with you, how will you respond, or what would be your next steps (continue personal education, start an approved small group, start a community group outside your local church, find a different church community who aligns with your convictions, get involved with a local/national ministry)?

Resources for Church leaders:

- Evangelical Immigration Table
 - Bible study resources, sermon outlines, videos, ways to get involved
- World Relief
 - Good Neighbor Teams, Churches of Welcome Partnerships, helping immigration information
- Women of Welcome
 - Bible studies, how to help guides, films and reading recommendations
- Be the Bridge
 - Training, community groups, resources, and reading recommendations

TALKING TO ELECTED OFFICIALS



How to Do I Contact My Elected Officials and What do I Say?

It may surprise you how effective you can be when advocating for others.

A central part of the job for every elected leader – from a local school board official to the President of the United States – is to listen to their constituents and to learn which issues are most important to them before making policy decisions.

After all, our elected officials represent, and ultimately work for, us!

Federal, state, and local representatives know that if they are not responsive to their constituents' concerns, they could face a harder time getting reelected the next time their name shows up on the ballot.

This isn't just wishful thinking – sometimes even just a few voices can affect real change. There are all kinds of examples of elected officials changing their minds or redirecting on a particular issue after hearing from their constituents. Members of Congress and staffers regularly reference conversations they have had with constituents when debating and negotiating legislation.

When a constituent of Congressman Seth Moulton contacted his office asking for help accessing his Veterans Affairs benefits, it came to light just how confusing some of the VA paperwork was. Prompted by this one phone call, he introduced a bill aiming to simplify government paperwork so that confusing jargon doesn't stand in the way of people receiving their benefits.

Senator Todd Young was pretty clear on the importance of constituent phone calls as he decides which way to vote. He referenced particular legislation where the calls to his office had about a 10:1 ratio, showing that his office is tallying up voter concerns. "For me, it's just listening to my constituents and being responsive, and occasionally government actually needs to do that — to be responsive."

Remember, you don't have to be an expert on the subject matter to make a difference.

Remember you're an expert on your own personal experience and community.

Legislators want to hear from everyday people in their districts. They want to hear from you. It is much more important for your message to be personal and authentic than for it to demonstrate expertise on an issue.

Sharing your story and perspective by simply discussing why you care about the issue is more than enough to make a difference. If you make a phone call (and we hope you do!), one thing that can ease your worries is to know that the person answering the phone is not going to debate you or talk you out of any position. In fact, if you don't reach an answering machine, you'll talk to an intern or staffer who simply marks down the issue you called about and what your position was. They usually ask if you'd like to receive a follow-up phone call or email on the topic. And that's it!

These staffers report back to our representatives on how many times they've received calls on a particular issues. If enough calls are made for any given issue, the team follows up/discusses if further considerations or policies need to be addressed. The more calls from you the better! (You can reach out more than once!)

Ok – so who are your representatives? Head to this site, and type in your address to find the Members of Congress for the place where you live: two Senators and one Representative. Consider saving their phone numbers in your contacts so it's easy to make a call in the future. Only call your own representatives.

WHAT SHOULD YOU SAY?

1. Where you're from: It's important they know that they represent you! Hi, my name is _____, and I live in your district.

2. Who you are: Do you belong to the representative's same political party? Did you vote for them? Let them know! Are you an evangelical Christian? A pastor? A public school teacher? A nurse? A mom? Give them a very short description of who you are.

Mention any affinity groups that you are a part of that they might be interested in.

3. What you care about: Sometimes you'll have specific language to use around a specific policy (ex: I'm asking you to support the Afghan Adjustment Act), but most of the time, you are simply letting them know that you believe that our country can do better, and you want them to work on the issue.

For example: I'm concerned about families waiting at the border to go through the asylum process. Or: I'm concerned about Dreamers who need a permanent solution from Congress.

Ready to make a call or write an e-mail?

Check out our "[latest advocacy needs](#)" page for ideas and prompts.



You can also meet your representatives face to face.

If you have the chance, meeting with an elected official or their staff is one of the most effective ways to share your views on matters important to you. Whether you participate in an in-person meeting, attend a local event, or meet virtually, sharing your perspective face to face allows you to make your advocacy personal.

If you've never visited your Senator or Representative's office (locally or in D.C.) it may sound incredibly intimidating. But once you try it, you'll realize after that first meeting it's just a simple conversation with another person. Hundreds of thousands of people travel to D.C. to visit congressional offices every year. It's a completely normal – and very important – part of the legislative process.

For a more detailed guide to meetings on Capitol Hill, [click here](#).

Action Checklist:

- Do a bit of research to see if any of your representatives have Town Hall events near you. For your Representative, you shouldn't have to travel too far! Even Senators try to host events all throughout the state. Write out one paragraph about why you support immigrants in your community, and what steps you'd like to see your Representative take in case you get the chance to speak.
- Extra credit: call your local office for your Representative and ask the person answering the phone how to set up an in-person meeting with your representative. They will outline the process their specific office has and let you know what is possible. If you are able to set a meeting, you can always email the Women of Welcome team, and we can help support you as you prepare.

We would love to know if you are able to meet with your representatives. We are here to support you any way we can!



5 TIPS to make your federal advocacy more effective

Be local.

If you're contacting or meeting your representative, make sure they know you're one of their constituents. Representatives' offices love to hear how an issue might impact those in their district or state. When possible it's always best to explain specifically how an issue might impact you or others in your area. Remember: your state representatives works for you!

Be authentic.

Speaking up is most effective when your message rings true, so it's always helpful to discuss your specific interest in an issue from your perspective. Personalizing your message helps make it accessible and memorable - it helps distinguish your story from those of others. Feel free to share why your faith/values motivate your involvement. Sending a form or template email to a congressional office does make a difference, but it's most effective when you've taken the time to personalize it.

Be courteous and Christ-like

Simple friendliness can go a long way when trying to converse with someone about this complex topic. If you are meeting your legislator or their staff in person, it is important to remain polite and courteous even in disagreement. Follow up your meeting with an email thanking them and providing any helpful follow-up information. If you're comfortable with doing so, offering to pray for the person you're meeting with can be a great way to close the conversation.

Explain your message concisely.

To maximize the impact of your message, be clear and concise when sharing. Don't feel pressure to take on every issue within immigration all at once. Be thoughtful about what you you'd like to see change, giving a handful of reasons why you feel this is important for your community and the nation.

Be persistent.

Engaging the culture around you and working toward meaningful change requires a patient, long-term approach. We know it can feel lonely, but persevering with your message reminds your representatives that their constituents care even when an issue is not breaking news. Lasting change takes time. Think of the suffragettes working to earn women the right to vote. Many who devoted their whole life to that movement didn't live to see the 19th amendment pass. Moses faithfully led God's people to the edge of the Promised Land, but never entered himself. Scripture reminds us to not get weary of doing good, but that we will reap a harvest at the right time if we don't give up.

IN YOUR COMMUNITY

How Can I Help in My Community?

Many times our lack of personal relationships with others makes us feel more isolated and unaffected by national narratives, policies, and personal challenges. And yet, one thing can change all that: **intentional proximity**.

You may not feel like you live close to immigrants and refugees, but usually a quick Google search can showcase areas of your community you've rarely, if ever, have engaged with before. Do your best to slow down and look deeper in your own community (city, county, region). Where can you find intentional proximity to serve, invest, or simply be a friend?

Things to look for in your community:

- Ethnic grocery stores
- Ethnic restaurants
- English language classes/tutor postings

Things to search for on the web:

- Local immigrant congregations
- Local refugee resettlement ministries
- Local immigrant services
- Specific ministry offices: World Relief, Lutheran Family Services, Catholic Charities

While this guide is meant to give you a good foundation,
with the constant stream of immigration headlines
you'll likely always have questions that need solid answers.

Here's a list of COMMON QUESTIONS to refer to when needed.

Make sure you're following along with Women of Welcome to get the most up to date and accurate information.

@ WomenofWelcome (IG)

@ WomenofWelcome (FB)

@ WomenofWelcome (Private FB group)

Women of Welcome YouTube

For Bi-weekly Policy Dispatch, weekly newsletter, and text alert sign ups, [click here!](#)

Your voice is needed and we're confident that you're going to do great things for Christ and for people he loves. Remember, you're not alone. Women of Welcome + Be the Bridge are strong communities of Christians who are learning and stepping into these brave spaces together.

For more answers to common questions and helpful free resources, visit WomenofWelcome.com. For more educational videos on specific topics from subject matter experts, watch Women of Welcome's Equipping Series.



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