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Immigration is Our Story

WORKSHOP



OSJ
△ Office of Social Justice



Christian Reformed Church
**Faith Formation
Ministries**

justice.crcna.org/immigration-our-story

The CRCNA has an immigration story. Originally founded by Dutch Reformed immigrants in the mid-1800s, the immigrant experience is a significant part of our denomination's history. Unless you are First Nations, or descendants of enslaved peoples, your own family has an immigration story too.

To hear one another's stories and learn about immigration in the U.S. both yesterday and today, engage your congregation in the “**Immigration Is Our Story**” workshop created by the CRC's **Office of Social Justice** and **Faith Formation Ministries**. This workshop can last anywhere from 90-120 minutes.





SUPPLIES NEEDED



Whiteboard and dry erase markers or a posterboard, easel, and markers



Post-it notes and pens for the group



Tech/AV equipment (computer, Internet access, video/projection, sound)



Optional: materials and resources from OSJ and FFM (p. 7)

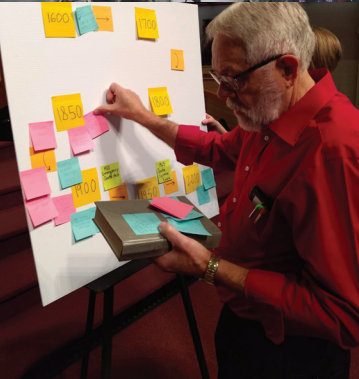


Simple refreshments if desired

SETUP

At the front of the room, set up a large whiteboard or poster board/easel with a relatively spread out timeline starting with **“1600 and prior,”** followed by **“1650, 1700, 1750, etc. up until the present”**. Participants will place sticky notes on the timeline marking when their family came to the U.S.

Have the **“Immigration Is Our Story” video** (<http://bit.ly/CRCImmigrationStory>) of your choice and the **“How the U.S. Immigration System Works” video** (<http://bit.ly/HowImmigrationWorksUS>) loaded and ready to go on a large screen with sound; distribute pens and sticky notes to participants prior to starting the workshop.





WORKSHOP OUTLINE

Follow these simple steps to facilitate the Immigration Storytelling Workshop.

- 1. CHOOSE A VIDEO.** Before the workshop, choose one of OSJ's "*Immigration Is Our Story*" (<http://bit.ly/CRCImmigrationStory>) video interviews to have the group watch together. Consider using one that you anticipate will connect the most with the group and their own families' immigration stories.
- 2. SHARE STORIES IN SMALL GROUPS.** Invite participants to pair up with a partner near them (preferably someone they didn't come with and/or don't know well) to share their own family's immigration story or that of someone they know. Have them write their family's *name(s)*, *country of origin*, and *immigration year/timeframe* (if known) on sticky notes and place them along the timeline.
- 3. SHARE STORIES IN THE LARGE GROUP.** As a large group, ask for a show of hands of a) people who had stories *similar* to that of the one told in the "Immigration Is Our Story" interview and b) people who had stories that were quite *different* from the interview. Ask a few people from these groups to share what was similar and what was different.
- 4. EXPLORE U.S. IMMIGRATION LAW.** Draw the participants' attention to the timeline and explain that everyone's year of immigration and country of origin are very important details as they relate to U.S. immigration law through the years. Key dates and policy changes to point out include:*

- There were no laws regulating immigration into the U.S. until 1882, when Congress passed the **Chinese Exclusion Act**, which barred the entry of new Chinese immigrants and excluded access to citizenship for those already here.
- For decades, there was no U.S. law that restricted immigration on anyone other than Asians until 1921, when Congress introduced the **Emergency Quota Act**, which limited immigration from southern and eastern European countries and favored immigrants from northern European countries.
- In **1924**, Congress dropped the 1921 quotas even further and completely barred the entry of all Asian and Arab immigrants; under this system, nearly 90% of visas were granted to western Europeans.
- The quota system for immigration was eliminated in **1965**, which ended nationality as the basis for entry. This created the immigration system we have today, which is based on family relationships and employment skills.

For a complete U.S. immigration history timeline, reference the OSJ's "Church Between Borders**" workshop **session 2 slideshow**. Additional resources include this **interactive timeline** from Brown University and a **primer** from the National Immigration Forum on why comprehensive immigration reform is needed; please note that U.S. immigration policy is constantly changing, so these resources likely do not include the most recent immigration news.*

5. LEARN ABOUT TODAY'S IMMIGRATION SYSTEM. Based on these significant law changes and historical moments, invite participants to consider how different it may have been for them or their ancestors to come to the U.S. than it is for today's immigrants. Invite them to learn

how today's immigration system does—and doesn't—work for people across the globe who may want to come to the U.S. by watching **this video** (<http://bit.ly/HowImmigrationWorksUS>), created by the OSJ team.

6. DISCUSS IN SMALL GROUPS. After viewing the video, ask participants to break into small groups of 3-5 to discuss:

- What did this video help you understand about immigration today? What surprised you?
- How can our stories and our understanding of how immigration works today motivate us to act with justice and compassion toward today's immigrants?

7. REPORT BACK. Come back to the large group and ask to hear a few answers to the two small group questions. If participants had a hard time coming up with answers to the second question, tell them about the importance and role of faith-based advocacy in “doing justice” on immigration today. Invite participants to do a particular “call to action:” visit the **OSJ's action center** for the most timely and relevant immigration advocacy opportunities to share with participants.

8. PRAY TOGETHER. Close by having small groups gather together to pray for immigrants, immigration reform, and courage on behalf of the faith community to be stewards for justice.

9. SHARE RESOURCES. Point people to **OSJ resources on immigration**, remind them of the “call to action” you asked them to do (in #7), and see if they have any follow-up questions. You may also point them to other opportunities to incorporate storytelling in their congregation through Faith Formation Ministries' **Faith Storytelling Toolkit**.



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