



Interfaith Prayer Service for Immigration Reform

January 27, 2011

Christ the King Lutheran Church

Houston, Texas

Michael Rinehart, Bishop of the TX-LA Gulf Coast Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Grace and peace to all who are gathered here, young and old, rich and poor, those of every faith, and those of no faith. All are welcome here. May this be a house of prayer for all people, today, and every day.

Everyone take a deep breath and smile. Here we are, Muslims, Jews and Christians, all sitting here under one roof, and the sky is not falling. Look at the person next to you, across from you. They have arms and legs, eyes and ears, blood flowing through their veins. We are one in our humanity.

Blessed are you who love the stranger and sojourner:

- the orphan and widow
- the refugee and immigrant
- the wayfarer and alien

Blessed are you who, because of the love of God poured into your hearts:

- resist the natural urge to fear the stranger
- resist the urge to hate those who are different from you
- resist the urge to push away the outsider

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil falsely against you because you:

- stand up for the powerless
- choose to be a voice for the voiceless
- dare to touch the untouchable

Great is your reward in heaven.

We are gathered here because we religious leaders, in spite of our diverse faiths have discovered something astounding. All our traditions, show a remarkable concern for the widow, the orphan and the alien. All of our Scriptures enjoin us to love the stranger and care for the sojourner in our midst.

We are gathered here today to share that love the stranger, and proclaim a faith that moves us beyond the rhetoric of fear.

Today I'd like to address:

1. Some religious and Scriptural foundations for our love of the stranger
2. Some reflections on our American context
3. Our shared dream for a compassionate and faithful future

1. Some religious and scriptural foundations for our love of the stranger

As someone once said, the Scriptures are the ultimate immigration handbook. And here's why: Immigration is the story of the human race. The history of the world is the history of migration – people moving from place to place because of wars, famine, political unrest, and poverty.

How a society treats strangers is vitally important to people of faith, and to our various Scriptures that seem to have a curious obsession with hospitality, as well as compassion and kindness.

The Hindu Upanishads tells us “the guest is a representative of God” (1.11.2).

The Qur'an says, “Do good to...those in need, neighbors who are near, neighbors who are strangers, the companion by your side, the wayfarer that you meet” (4:36).

The Tanakh, the Hebrew Bible says in Leviticus 19 (vv. 33-34), “The strangers who sojourn with you shall be to you as the natives among you, and you shall love them as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”

In the New Testament, Jesus says to the righteous on Judgment Day, “When I was a stranger you welcomed me... Whatsoever you do to the least of these, you do to me.”

The stories of the Abrahamic faiths are stories of immigration.

- Adam and Eve are evicted from the Garden (Gen. 3:22-24)
- God calls Abraham to leave his country and kindred and go to a new land (Gen. 12:1)
- The Israelites are sojourners in Egypt, and then immigrate to the promised land. (Exodus)
- Jesus flees persecution by Herod into Egypt. (Matthew 2)

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994), citing Ex. 20:20-22. “The Bible teaches that sins against foreigners are especially serious sins, sins that cry out to Heaven.”

A quick word search of the Qur'an online, for the word “wayfarer” brings up nine results, most of which show that Allah expects his followers to give alms – not 10% but 20%! – out of love, for the – guess who? – orphan, needy, and wayfarer. This should ring in the ears of all of us from every faith here. And, to ransom slaves.

I am moved by Malachi (3:5): “Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, **against those who thrust aside the sojourner**, and do not fear me, says the Lord of hosts.

In the Hebrew Bible, passages about the sojourner appear 50 times more than many other moral themes that often get pounded. One would think that we religious leaders should statistically be preaching about sojourners 50 times as often!

2. Some reflections on our American context

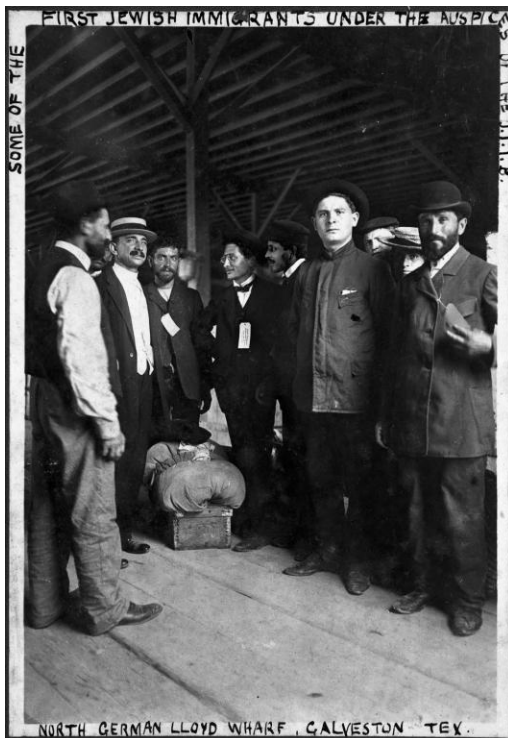
The exhibit on immigration into Galveston will be at the Houston Museum of Natural Science for the rest of February and then it will be gone. I strongly encourage you to take a couple of hours and check it out.

It fascinates me that for most of the 1800's immigration was unregulated. In fact people were aggressively encouraged to immigrate. Fliers were published and sent to Europe offering cheap land in Texas and the railroads offered cheap passage to get here. It was a frenzy. Move to Texas! Galveston became one of the wealthiest cities in the U.S.

Not only was immigration unregulated, and aggressively encouraged, but millions of people were forced to immigrate against their will. In 1800 there were 1 million slaves in the United States. By 1860, there were 4 million slaves in the United States. 3 million immigrants, to provide the cheapest possible labor for cotton and tobacco farmers. And don't miss the economics of this. Businesses that did not use slaves found it almost impossible to compete in the market, because the slave-owners could bring their crops to market at a much cheaper cost, undercutting the price.

When the slaves were freed in the 1860's many stayed on as cheap labor, but whites considered them inferior and unreliable. They did not want blacks to immigrate, because they weren't considered "real" Americans.

On the West Coast, Chinese were being "imported" in droves as cheap labor for the railroads. They were also treated poorly, and an interesting debate sprung up. Are Chinese people white, or colored? This debate made it all the way to the Supreme Court of California, which made a ruling – made a ruling! – that Chinese people were indeed... colored. Mind you this was not a scientific designation. It was a social designation, a designation of privilege. There is no scientific basis for any of this. Whiteness is a matter of status in a society: who gets privileges, and who does not. Ironically, it was decided that Mexicans were... white. I'm just giving you the facts.



At the same time, a new wave of immigrants began, from southern Europe. These people were not our kind of people. Read the quotes from the day. They had unpronounceable names (to Northern Europeans). Their noses were too big. They had no money. They spoke **strange** languages, had **strange** political ideas, had **strange** religious practices. Their hair was **strange**. They smelled **strange**. They were **strangers**. Horrific pogroms in Russia and Poland brought Jews fleeing for safety. For they heard new and unusual words coming from us. Words like, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal." Words like: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech..." (First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution).

Enough already! What is going to happen to us if we are overrun by these... undesirable elements? They don't fit. They don't seem, American. So customs inspections were ramped up. What is your name? What is your religion? What

is your political persuasion? Have you ever committed a crime? Are you sick? What can you do? After six weeks at sea, many immigrants were turned back at the docks in Galveston and told to go home.



By the turn of the century there were many different laws in different places, so in 1917 congress passed a law completely barring all Asians from immigrating. Then, in 1924 congress passed the Immigration Act, which Stephen Klineberg calls the most racist legislation ever passed in American history. (Personally I think the Indian Removal Act comes pretty close.) The Immigration Act set quotas on how many could come in from each country. It limited the number of immigrants who could be admitted from any country to 2% of the number of people from that country who were already living in the United States in 1890, according to the 1890 census (which by the way, wasn't finished until nearly 1900). It was designed to limit the immigration of inferior races.

Supporters based their opinions on a book by Madison Grant that claimed the superiority of the Northern European race, an idea that would find horrific expression in WWII. If society was run by a ruling class of intelligent Northern Europeans, all would be well. If not, all would be chaos.

Here's what happened. Prior to the Act, 200,000 Italians immigrated every year. 200,000 per year. The Act, limited Italian immigrants to a quota of 4,000. 200,000 to 4,000. In fact, European immigration was limited to a combined total of only 155,000 people. 86% would be Northern Europeans. Drink that in for a moment.

Now, get this. The Act set no limits on immigration from Latin American countries.

Think about that for a moment. It makes you wonder what our immigration laws are really about.

Today, I hear that Latin American immigration is no longer unlimited. I wonder why that is.



1893 Keppler political cartoon "Looking Backward"

So here are some myths and facts.

According to 2010 Census data Texas' population is up 20% to 25 million. We're growing twice as fast as the nation. This means 4 new congressional districts and hence 4 more seats in the House for Texas, while New York and Ohio each lost two seats. This growth has given Houston a robust economy. Most of that growth has been immigrants. Latinos have accounted for the majority. The Anglo population has actually dipped a bit.

The myth is that immigration is easy. The fact is only 5,000 green cards are given out a year for low-wage workers, and yet our economy depends on over 1,000,000 workers. Families wait years for reunification. Spouses and minors of green card holders face waits of one to two years to join their families in the United States. Siblings of U.S. citizens wait 9-19 years for visas. People say all the time, "They are breaking our laws." But the reality is, most of them would come legally if the quotas were changed.

- "Breaking Down the Problems: What's Wrong with Our Immigration System?" (Immigration Policy Center, Oct. 2009), http://immigrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/docs/Problem_Paper_FINAL_102109_0.pdf (accessed April 22, 2010).
- *Visa Bulletin* vol. IX, no. 24, (Department of State, September 2010), http://www.travel.state.gov/visa/frvi/bulletin/bulletin_5113.html (accessed September 18, 2010).

Myth: Immigrants take jobs away from Americans.

Fact: Between 2000 and 2005, the availability of native-born low-wage workers declined by approximately 1.8 million.

- Randolph Capps, Karina Fortuny, Michael E. Fix. "Trends in the Low-Wage Immigrant Labor Force, 2000-2005," report (Urban Institute, March 2007), <http://www.urban.org/publications/411426.html> (accessed April 27, 2010).
- Rob Paral & Associates. "The Unemployment and Immigration Disconnect: Untying the Knot Part I of III," (Immigration Policy Center, May 2009), <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/docs/Part%201%20-%20Unemployment%20Disconnect%20%2005-19-09.pdf> (accessed April 27, 2010).

Myth: Immigrants don't pay taxes.

Fact: All immigrants pay taxes. Even undocumented immigrants pay sales taxes and real estate taxes (either directly as homeowners or indirectly through rent). The Social Security Administration says most unauthorized immigrants pay federal, state, and local taxes, including Medicare, and \$6–7 billion in Social Security taxes that will never benefit them. Alan Greenspan told congress that immigrants were bailing out Social Security. In addition, a recent study found that 90% of the surveyed population had paid taxes prior to receiving permanent residency.

- "The Impact of Unauthorized Immigrants on the Budgets of State and Local Governments," (Congressional Budget Office Dec. 2007), <http://cbo.gov/ftpdocs/87xx/doc8711/12-6-Immigration.pdf#page=5> (accessed April 26, 2010).
- Eduardo Porter, "Illegal Immigrants Are Bolstering Social Security with Billions," *New York Times*, April 5, 2005, <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/05/business/05immigration.html> (accessed April 27, 2010).
- Laura E. Hill, Magnus Lofstrom, and Joseph M. Hayes. "Immigrant legalization: Assessing the Labor Market Effects," report (Public Policy Institute of California April 2010), http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/rb/RB_410LHRB.pdf (accessed April 26, 2010).

Myth: Immigrants are a drain on the economy.

Fact: Immigrants represent roughly \$2.8 trillion to U.S. taxpayers, who receive the benefit of their labor without the cost of their education.

- Julia Preston. "Workforce Fueled by Highly Skilled Immigrants," *New York Times*. April 15, 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/16/us/16skilled.html>
- "Separating Fact from Fiction: Refugees, Immigrants and Public Benefits," Immigration Fact Check (Immigration Policy Center of the American Immigration Law Foundation, September 8, 2008), <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/docs/RefugeesImmigrantsandPublicBenefits9-8-08.pdf> (accessed April 26, 2010).

Myth: Immigrants don't learn English.

Fact: There are Lutheran Churches in Texas that taught Confirmation auf Deutsch for nearly 100 years. (There are probably some that still do.)

- "Breaking Down the Problems: What's Wrong with Our Immigration System?" (Immigration Policy Center, Oct. 2009), http://immigrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/docs/Problem_Paper_FINAL_102109_0.pdf (accessed April 27, 2010).
- *2009 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*, (Department of Homeland Security, April 2010), 51, http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/publications/natz_fr_2009.pdf (accessed April 22, 2010).

Myth: Immigration leads to an increase in crime and violence.

Fact: Crime rates are lowest in states with the highest immigration growth rates. From 1999 to 2006, the total crime rate declined 13.6% in the 19 highest-immigration states, compared to a 7.1% percent decline in the other 32 states.

Research also shows that the incarceration rate for native-born men age 18-39 has been five times higher than the rate for immigrant men. Even with increased immigration, the violent crime rate in the United States has declined 34.2% and the property crime rate has fallen 26.4%.

- Rubén G. Rumbaut and Walter A. Ewing. "The Myth of Immigrant Criminality and the Paradox of Assimilation: Incarceration Rates among Native and Foreign Born Men," (Immigration Policy Center, American Immigration Law Foundation, Spring 2007), p. 6-10. [http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/docs/Imm%20Criminality%20\(IPC\).pdf](http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/docs/Imm%20Criminality%20(IPC).pdf) (accessed April 28, 2010)

3. Our shared dream for a compassionate and faithful future

Because our diverse traditions all call us to welcome the stranger and sojourner, we have a shared dream for a compassionate and faithful future. But it cannot be done with the laws that are currently in place. We call upon our political leaders to fix these laws. Here's what we believe in, specifically:

1. **Family reunification must be our highest priority.** Reunited families separated by visa backlogs created by an outdated system. Revise per country caps, and family preference categories. Remove bars to reentry.
2. **A process must be created for undocumented workers in this country to gain legal status.** 80% of Americans are in favor of an earned path to citizenship for these 10 million vulnerable undocumented people living in the shadows. We love these people.
3. **We must protect workers** and provide a way for migrants to come in a legal and safe way. We exploit these people and then we throw them in detention. This is not right.
4. **We must reform detention and restore due process.** If we hold these truths to be self-evident, then they are self-evident truths and rights for all people.

These are just a few. You can visit the Houston Interfaith Statement on Immigration Reform online.

<http://www.catholiccharities.org/attachments/wysiwyg/7533/interfaithimmigrationprinciples.pdf>

We have reason to hope. The right will always win in the end.

In recent months several influential conservative Christian evangelical leaders—including people like Richard Land of the Southern Baptist Convention—have voiced support for immigration reform including an earned pathway to legalization for many undocumented immigrants. According to a recent poll (<http://www.publicreligion.org/research/?id=279>) conducted by the Public Religion Research Institute, **60% of white evangelicals support immigration reform** that outlines a path to citizenship. That's just white Christian evangelicals. If you throw in the rest of us, 80% of Americans support an earner path to citizenship. It's the only thing that makes sense. Now why can't 80% of us get this done?

Friends, let us love the stranger, love the stranger, love the stranger. Let's be the place that continues to say with Emma Lazarus, "**Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free...**" Let's be the city on the hill, where everyone wins. The poor win. The refugees win. The economy wins. Houston wins. Continental Airlines, or whatever they're gonna call it wins. And friends, people of faith will win, because we will be truly living our values, God's values. Amen.

Other Bible Passages

Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt. Deut. 10:19

And the Levite, (because he hath no part nor inheritance with thee,) and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, which are within thy gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied; that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hand which thou doest. Deut. 14:29

And thou shalt rejoice in thy feast, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite, the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are within thy gates. Deut. 16:14

Thou shalt not abhor an Edomite; for he is thy brother: thou shalt not abhor an Egyptian; because thou wast a stranger in his land. Deut. 23:7

Thou shalt not pervert the judgment of the stranger, nor of the fatherless; nor take a widow's raiment to pledge. Deut. 24:17

When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands. Deut. 24:19

When thou beatest thine olive tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow. Deut. 24:20

When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterward: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow. Deut. 24:21

Leviticus 19:33-34 ESV / 87 helpful votes

“When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.

Exodus 22:21 ESV / 38 helpful votes

“You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.

Matthew 25:35 ESV / 35 helpful votes

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me,

Malachi 3:5 ESV

“Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the Lord of hosts.

Deuteronomy 27:19 ESV

“‘Cursed be anyone who perverts the justice due to the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’

Deuteronomy 26:5 ESV

“And you shall make response before the Lord your God, ‘A wandering Aramean was my father. And he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number, and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous.

Leviticus 25:35 ESV

“If your brother becomes poor and cannot maintain himself with you, you shall support him as though he were a stranger and a sojourner, and he shall live with you.

Genesis 12:1 ESV

Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.

Psalms 137:1-9 ESV

By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion. On the willows there we hung up our lyres. For there our captors required of us songs, and our tormentors, mirth, saying, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!” How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill!

Genesis 3:22-24 ESV

Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—" therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.

Resources from Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service:

- LIRS Resources: <http://www.lirs.org/site/c.nhLPJOPMKuG/b.5544437/k.EEB4/Resources.htm>
- LIRS Worship Resources: http://www.lirs.org/site/c.nhLPJOPMKuG/b.5544439/k.A361/Worship_Tools.htm
- Be Not Afraid:
http://www.lirs.org/site/c.nhLPJOPMKuG/b.5604399/k.9D08/Be_Not_Afraid_Resources_for_Congregations_and_Immigrant_Families_Fractured_by_Fear.htm
- Advocacy: <http://www.lirs.org/site/c.nhLPJOPMKuG/b.5544327/k.C9F7/Advocacy.htm>