



Ideas for Schools, Religious Education, and Youth Programs

Many schools, religious education programs, and youth programs have been facing an increase of young people from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds and are attempting to find a faith-inspired response to the changes in their midst. This resource is designed to help parishes and schools in this endeavor.

The U.S. bishops' pastoral letter *Strangers No Longer. Together on The Journey of Hope* calls us to move beyond the anti-immigrant stance to promote laws and policies that respect the human dignity of all people.

Instilling these values as part of our education programs will enable us to be people who will welcome all newcomers into parishes and communities; assist neighbors regardless of race, culture, or creed; and advocate for fair and just laws for all persons.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

The following activities should be adjusted to each classroom situation and can be expanded with creativity, time, and initiative.

YOUNGER CHILDREN

When working with younger children, the most important thing is to teach children to accept and love differences. The teacher's role in leading the students through these activities is critical to achieve the desired objectives. By conducting these exercises with a spirit of enthusiasm and welcome, the teacher will find these activities popular with young children.

† The Good Samaritan parable illustrates how Jesus wants us to respond to those in need who may be different from us. Talk about simple ways that children can be welcoming and neighborly to immigrants, refugees, and migrants.

† Teach a rhyme or verse in a different language. Many examples probably are available locally; one Spanish example follows:

(Hold fingers up for each of number from 1 to 8, then wiggle all eight fingers for the funny ending.)
pin-uno, pin-dos, pin-tre, pin-cuatro, pin-cinco,
pin-seis, pin-siete, pin-ochó, pingüino!

- † Read the story *Swimmy*, by Leo Lionni, to the children. Discuss how all the fish worked together for the good of all. Explain the need for families, parishes, and schools to work together so that all people may have a better life.
- † Discuss the many reasons that immigrants and refugees come to the United States: lack of food, work, or shelter in their homeland; persecution for religious or political reasons; war; violence; famine; drought; and family separation.
- † Ask the children to share life experiences regarding newcomers the children personally know. Initiate a discussion with questions such as these: Have you learned anything special from a person of another culture? Do you know any words or songs from another language? Have you ever eaten food from another culture?
- † As needed, use the following questions to review the following concepts with your group:

Who is an immigrant? Do you know any immigrants? Who are they? Where do they live? Have any persons told you about how they felt when they came to this country? What do you think it means to treat others as sisters and brothers?



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FOR YOUTH

- † Read the following Scripture verses: Ex 23:9, Lv 19:33-34, Dt 10:17-19, Is 58:7, Lk 10:29-37, Mt 2:13-15, and Mt 25:34-40. What does God say to respond to immigrants? Our faith tradition has a long history of hospitality and respect for the stranger or alien. The flight into Egypt describes the Holy Family as refugees fleeing from the wrath of King Herod. Have you ever thought of the Holy Family in this way? What could you do for a refugee family today? Do you see the face of Jesus when you meet people who are hungry, thirsty, or in need of clothing and shelter?
- † Have the class write a bill of rights by which they would want to live. Compare these rights with the rights of (or lack thereof) immigrants.
- † Have the class compare the **United States Bill of Rights** (National Archives—www.nara.gov/exhall/charters/billrights/billmain.html), the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** (www.un.org/Overview/rights.html), and the Church's teaching on the rights of all people. Which is more encompassing? Stress that the Gospel alternative to the present situation is that all people would have equal access to resources to meet their basic human needs.
- † Invite young immigrants or foreign exchange students to present their personal stories. Ask children to note similarities and/or differences between their lives and those of the newcomers.
- † In history or current events classes, have students bring in newspaper and magazine articles about immigrants. Make a collage of pictures. Explain how many of these stories depict the hardships that immigrants encounter in everyday life. Analyze the approaches taken in the articles to see how racism, prejudice, stereotyping, fear, and xenophobia (anti-foreigner sentiment) were either fostered or discouraged. For an action response, have students write letters to the editor.
- † Study the immigration history of the United States. Note how immigrants have been welcomed or reviled depending upon the economy and political climate in our country. Refer to the **U.S. Census Bureau** (www.census.gov) website for graphs on recent immigration. Engage in a broader discussion of world events such as war, famine, natural disasters, political instability, and religious persecution that cause worldwide migration.
- † Research the top ten countries from which the United States receives immigrants. Research the top ten countries from which the United States receives refugees. Study the reasons why immigrants and refugees are coming from these countries. Discuss the Catholic social teaching principle of solidarity and how this principle challenges us to respond to our brothers and sisters around the world. Refer to *Called to Global Solidarity* (USCCB publication no. 5-118). Refer to the **Catholic Relief Services** website (www.catholicrelief.org) for important information on how the Catholic Church responds to the call for global solidarity.
- † Continue the above activity by referring to *One Family Under God* (<http://www.usccbpublishing.org/searchproducts.cfm>) and *Strangers No Longer* (<http://www.usccb.org/mrs/stranger.shtml>) for the Church's teaching on the right and obligation to speak on behalf of migrants, for insight on how Christ's view of the neighbor challenges us to broaden the scope of common good and solidarity, and for information on how the Church acts as a guide for social law and policy as well as for individual attitudes and behaviors.
- † With clippings, photos, sayings and/or drawing create a bulletin board or montage which reflects many images of immigrant contributions, gift of culture, etc. The bulleting board will be displayed publicly.
- † Contact your diocesan office or refer to the Justice for Immigrants: A Journey of Hope website (www.justiceforimmigrants.org) to learn about immigrants.
- † Find examples of current treatment of immigrants. Using those examples evaluate government policy in the light of the human rights teachings of the Church.
- † Hold a cartoon contest in which the students illustrate unjust treatment of immigrants throughout U.S. history.
- † Hold a poster contest illustrating current examples of U.S. immigration laws that negatively affect immigrants or migrants.
- † Choose a major piece of legislation or policy initiative (national or local) which affects immigrants and follow its progress throughout.
- † Write letters to the U.S. Congress regarding just immigration laws. (See the Justice for Immigrants web site <http://www.justiceforimmigrants.org/action.html>)
- † Have students research the requirements for becoming a citizen. For an action response, have youth volunteers at local agencies help immigrants prepare for citizenship tests.

GENERAL SUGGESTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

- † Familiarize yourself with the U.S. bishops' pastoral statement *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope* (see www.justice-forimmigrants.org) and the companion brochure that summarizes it. Decide what are realistic goals, in your unique situation, for weaving this message into your educational programs.
- † Make use of existing resources such as the Bible, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, resources from the U.S. bishops' Office of Migration and Refugee Services, and publications and website listings herein and in the enclosed *Resource Bibliography*.
- † Infuse the message *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope* into what you are already doing.
- † Have students include petitions for immigrants when preparing for liturgies for children and youth. Ask the students to remember them in their daily prayers.
- † Weave the theme of welcoming immigrants into class discussions while covering other topics. The following subjects lend themselves to enhancing positive attitudes towards immigrants: immigration history of the United States; citizenship requirements in civics; and customs and cultures of other countries in geography, music, art, and foreign language classes.
- † Seize opportunities that present themselves in current events to discuss the Church's position on welcoming the stranger. Note that the Church's position often contrasts with U.S. governmental policies on immigrants, migrants, or refugees.
- † Encourage students and their parents to appreciate that the Gospel is asking us not only to provide food and shelter to immigrants but also to advocate on their behalf for just laws and policies. Provide opportunities for reflection on what we, as Catholics, need to do to change attitudes and laws to provide for all marginalized and vulnerable people.
- † Encourage students and their parents when performing service projects for immigrants, refugees, or migrants to reflect on our Catholic belief in the human dignity of all persons and their right to have all their basic human needs met.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

Many resources have been mentioned throughout the above activities. We encourage you to make use of the wealth of information available. In addition, please refer to the *Resource Bibliography* included in this Parish Kit for additional resources.



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