

Becoming Welcoming Congregations Workshops

Workshop: What You Need to Know About Refugee Resettlement Today

Attendees will learn important facts about refugees (some may surprise you!) and how you can be involved without being overwhelmed. Learn how time-limited and structured support to LSS is easier than you might think and more powerful than you could imagine.

Bio: Mary Flynn has been with Lutheran Social Services of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan for more than 26 years, the last 8 years as Program Manager of Refugee Resettlement. Mary has appeared on Wisconsin Public Radio, Milwaukee Public Radio and Wisconsin Public Television discussing refugee trends and services. She was a plenary speaker at the inaugural Our City of Nations Conference in Milwaukee in December 2015. Mary strives to follow the LSS tenets of valuing the infinite worth of the individual, diversity, interdependence, excellence and innovation. She also believes in the importance of humor in the workplace and humane workloads for staff.

Workshop: Becoming a Supportive Congregation of the New Sanctuary Movement

This workshop will cover what a church needs to become sanctuary. The pros and cons as well as the option of becoming supportive of a sanctuary church, as opposed to becoming one, will be discussed.

Bio: Bernie Gonzalez is a Mexican immigrant who came to the US at the age of 14, proud husband and father of 5. He is also a U.S. Army Veteran. Currently Bernie is a Lead Organizer for SOPHIA, a faith based organization at the local level, supported by WISDOM at the state level and Gamaliel at the national level. Bernie and his organization currently focus on mass incarceration issues, healthcare, transportation, housing and his passion, which is immigration. Providing leadership training to those affected by the issues is part of Bernie's role as an organizer. Currently Bernie facilitates a state-wide immigration call and participates on a national immigration call facilitated by Gamaliel's Civil Rights of Immigrants. Bernie is always planning events and actions with his task force members in order to continue to find ways to help our brothers and sisters at the local, state and national level.

Workshop: Becoming Welcoming Communities: Immigration in Light of Biblical Faith – A Curriculum for Congregations

This workshop will introduce “Becoming Welcoming Communities: Immigration in the Light of Biblical Faith,” a study guide for congregations from the Wisconsin Council of Churches. Through discussion and interactive exercises, the guide weaves together biblical stories of migration and displacement; the history of immigration from the 19th Century to the present day; contemporary experiences of immigrants and refugees; opportunities for participants to explore their own immigrant roots; and an overview of current immigration policy.

Bio: Alexia Gianitsos is a Religious Studies major at the UW-Madison and Public Policy Intern with the Wisconsin Council of Churches. Her interests and passions led her to study both religious studies and sociology in college. She sees both the study of religion and society more broadly, as integral parts of understanding human nature and more importantly, social injustice. She is personally interested in the Syrian refugee crisis. While visiting her family in Greece in the summers since 2014, she had the opportunity to observe the varying reaction of the Greek Orthodox church in response to the influx of refugees. For her senior thesis, she plans on moving this analysis to America, focusing on the way biblical worldviews are shaped to fit political agendas surrounding immigration.

Workshop: Understanding the Immigration Debate

The United States is home to approximately 10million undocumented immigrants. What to do about the situation is an ongoing topic of fierce debate that has bubbled for decades. Yet most people have surprisingly little knowledge about the exact nature of the US immigration system and the implications of different proposed solutions.

Bio: Sarah Blackwell is a Milwaukee-based immigration attorney. An immigrant herself, she has been practicing immigration law for 12 years, mostly doing family-based immigration, waivers of inadmissibility, removal proceedings and naturalization.