



Comprehensive Immigration Reform Advocacy Toolkit

August Recess 2013

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Dear friends,

Before immigration reform became a politically popular topic and during its recent time in the spotlight on Capitol Hill, our Church has played a vital role in bringing the human implication of broken policies to the attention of decision makers. Years of witness and education by Episcopalians in communities across the country have helped build the national momentum that made S. 744, the bipartisan comprehensive immigration bill that passed the Senate in June, a reality. Our work, however, is far from over.

Members of the House of Representatives return home to their districts for the month of August, making it the most pivotal month yet in a year of tireless advocacy. Despite poll after poll reporting that the majority of Americans support a pathway to citizenship, despite the momentum in the Senate, and despite the clear need for reform, a majority of the House has not yet decided to take up the issue of immigration. While lawmakers are home they need hear from their constituents and their neighbors that reform is needed in their community and communities across the country.

Your voice and the collective voice of The Episcopal Church is needed to ensure that our broken immigration system is reformed to unite rather than divide families, to foster citizenship rather than indentured servitude, and to ensure that every migrant, made in the image of God, is treated with dignity and respect. In the following pages, we suggest a variety of actions through which each of us can contribute to the transformation of this unjust structure in our society. One new suggestion offered by Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori after consultation with both Republican and Democratic lawmakers in the House who support comprehensive immigration reform is the dedication of a Sunday – sometime during the August congressional recess – for preaching and prayer about this important subject. The Presiding Bishop herself has offered some concrete and inspirational reflections on the lectionary for each Sunday in the recess; we hope these will inspire new and creative thinking.

This and other ideas that follow in this toolkit are suggestions from members of our Church, its leadership and staff, and our interfaith partners, but they are simply a starting point. Any action you take – whether you include your member of Congress in prayer, preach about the need for comprehensive immigration reform, host a vigil, visit your district congressional office, or place an immigration reform-themed message on your congregation’s sign – will help us move closer to the justice and reform that we seek for our country.

Thank you for your commitment to action. Work toward a just society is the responsibility and privilege of every baptized Christian, and our office is honored to support the excellent and transformational work Episcopalians throughout this Church are undertaking. Together we are building a churchwide conversation – but, even more than that, a churchwide movement.

In faith,

Alexander D. Baumgarten

Director of Government Relations

Katie Conway

Immigration and Refugee Policy Analyst

A Sunday of Prayer and Preaching on Comprehensive Immigration Reform

Last month, I spent a day with my staff in Washington meeting with both Republican and Democratic lawmakers to discuss the need for comprehensive immigration reform. Based on those conversations, and a need we clearly identified for grassroots action around immigration reform during the summer congressional recess while members of Congress are in their home districts, I urge Episcopal congregations to dedicate a Sunday during that recess to prayer and preaching on the need for reform.

We have a great deal of work to do in creating the momentum that will encourage the House of Representatives to pass immigration reform. The bar is high, but we've done this before. The Senate's historic passage of comprehensive reform earlier this year was a product of advocacy from people of faith and many others across the United States. Now, we must do it again for the House.

Welcome for the migrant and stranger is a mandate that runs through our Scriptural tradition. Accordingly, the readings appointed for any of the Sundays during the summer congressional recess provide ample opportunity to reflect upon this important work. I'm pleased to offer the following short reflections on the propers for each Sunday during this timeframe, and hope that they may prove useful to clergy and other congregational leaders wishing to plan a Sunday dedicated to this theme.

Know that my prayers are with you and with all who work to build a more just nation and world.

Your servant in Christ,

The Most Rev. Katharine Jefferts Schori

Sermon Themes Related to Immigration

First Sunday, August 4 - The first Sunday in August (Proper 13) has a nice connection between “out of Egypt I called my son” and strong proscriptions against greed in the psalm, Colossians, and the gospel. The gospel is particularly poignant on this theme, speaking of dividing the inheritance with one’s brother.

From the psalm: *Hear this, all you peoples; hearken, all you who dwell in the world, * you of high degree and low, rich and poor together.*

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Second Sunday, August 11 – The second Sunday (Proper 14) has this passage from Isaiah: *Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. (Isaiah 1:16-7)*

The psalm is also relevant and the Hebrews’ passage speaks of Abraham’s migration.

Psalm 33:13 *The LORD looks down from heaven, * and beholds all the people in the world.*

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Third Sunday, August 18 - (Proper 15) offers this in Psalm 80:8 *You have brought a vine out of Egypt; * you cast out the nations and planted it. 9 You prepared the ground for it; * it took root and filled the land.*

The gospel offers an opportunity to preach about division within families.

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Fourth Sunday, August 25 - (Proper 16) There are multiple connections in this week's readings, from both the gospel and Isaiah. The gospel offers some possibilities for connecting healing with just employment.

"There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day." But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?"

In Isaiah 58: *If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness...* Later the scripture mentions the “repairer of the breach.”

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Sunday September 1, Labor Day weekend - This Sunday offers, perhaps, the greatest resonance. Jeremiah speaks of being led through the wilderness into a plentiful land, and those who entered and defiled God's land. Hebrews: *do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers; remember those in prison, and those being tortured, as though you yourself were being tortured...*

The gospel seems especially appropriate, asking that we not take the place of honor for ourselves, and when giving a banquet, invite the poor!

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If you or your parish clergy preach on the topic of immigration or the treatment of strangers in our faith and in our communities, please share it with us. These sermons could easily become a letter from your congregation to your Representative or an op-ed. The Office of Government Relations and the Office of Communications would be happy to work with you on this or other adaptations of a sermon. Please email kconway@episcopalchurch.org for more information.

Visit your Representatives, Neighbor to Neighbor

Why call them Neighbor-to-Neighbor visits?

Bringing together a delegation of faith and community leaders to establish and nurture relationships with your senators and representatives is crucial for changing the “unjust structures” within our society. When members of Congress know their constituents care about refugees, family unity, humane enforcement, and immigrants’ rights, they vote accordingly. As both representatives and members of your communities, every senator and representative has an office – often multiple offices – in their home states. Visits to these offices are an impactful way to speak, neighbor to neighbor, with representatives and let them know the broken immigration system has affected your community.

Purpose of Neighbor-to-Neighbor In-District Visits

1. To fulfill the promise of our baptismal covenant and “strive for justice and peace.” Neighbor-to-neighbor visits put faith into action by demanding that senators and representative understand that we, as constituents and people of faith, want compassionate immigration reform.
2. To persuade your senators and representative to vote for immigration reform that prioritizes family unity for all families and provides a pathway to full citizenship.
3. To build relationships between people of faith and the public officials who make decisions that impact our communities.

It is helpful to meet with your senators and representative as early into the 113th Congress as possible. Urge them to support immigration reform based on the principles of full citizenship and family unity. Building these relationships early is also important as you will want to follow-up with them after an immigration bill is introduced.

Theological Grounding and Church Policy

“Will you strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being?” - Baptismal Covenant, Book of Common Prayer

We work with our immigrant brothers and sisters to advocate for justice not only as part of our ministry of public policy but also as part of our scriptural mandate. In the Old Testament alone there are 92 references to the stranger, and we are reminded, *“When immigrants live in your land with you, you must not cheat them. Any immigrant who lives with you must be treated as if they were one of your citizens. You must love them as yourself, because you were immigrants in the land of Egypt; I am the LORD your God.”* (Leviticus 19:33-34, Common English Bible)

In the Gospels, Jesus teaches that in welcoming and serving the sojourner, we welcome Jesus himself. *“I was a stranger and you welcomed me... when you have done it for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you have done it for me.”* (Matthew 25:35-40). The welcome that Jesus models and teaches his followers to exemplify is also found at the heart of the Good Samaritan parable, when he defines the good neighbor as *“the one who showed mercy.”* (Luke 10:37).

Firmly rooted in our ministry of welcome, the Episcopal Church has become a national leader in immigration advocacy. Informed by their experiences working with and in immigrant communities,

individuals, congregations, diocese, deputies and bishops have brought the broken pieces of our immigration system to General Convention. The resolutions passed by General Convention form the immigration policy backbone of the Episcopal Church and seek to enact a more just and humane immigration system. With politicians across the spectrum defining a pathway to citizenship, enforcement and family differently, it is important to define these key terms when meeting with decision makers.

A Pathway to Citizenship

For the majority of the 11 million undocumented immigrants residing in the United States, there is no accessible legal pathway through which they can adjust their status and therefore remain with their families and seek lawful employment. The Episcopal Church supports nothing less than a pathway to full citizenship for undocumented immigrants wishing to come out of the shadows and will not support overly punitive measures, such as making legalization contingent upon enforcement measures, or restricting access to basic civil rights such as voting, accessing child tax credits or sponsoring family members.

Resolutions:

- Urge the U.S. Congress to enact comprehensive immigration reform to give undocumented persons who have established roots in the United States a pathway to legalization and full social and economic integration into the United States. (GC 09)
- Adopt the fundamental principles that undocumented immigrants should have reasonable opportunity to pursue permanent residency, legal workers should be allowed to enter the U.S. to respond to recognized labor force needs, close family members should be allowed to reunite without undue delay with individuals lawfully present in the U.S; fundamental principles of legal due process should be granted to all persons and enforcement of national borders and immigration policies should be proportional and humane. Furthermore, the Episcopal Church deplores any action on behalf of the government, which unduly emphasizes enforcement, including militarization of the border between the United States and Mexico. (GC 06)

Protection for Refugees and other Vulnerable Migrants

The Episcopal Church supports a robust refugee resettlement program for those fleeing their countries to escape persecution, oppression, and war. Through the Episcopal Migration Ministries, our Church has worked in public-private partnership with the U.S. Government to resettle thousands of refugees since the inception of the program in 1980. In the decades since this ministry to “welcome the stranger” began, however, we have welcomed an ever-diversifying refugee population, including refugees from more than 69 nationalities, and an increasing number of refugees with serious medical conditions; refugees who are victims of torture and severe sexual-gender based violence; and more single female heads of household. The Episcopal Church is committed to welcoming refugees to peaceful homes and hopeful futures in the United States, but the laws that govern our refugee resettlement program and immigration system must change if the United States is to continue as the world leader in humanitarian resettlement.

Resolutions:

- Urge the United States Congress to reform the Refugee Act of 1980 in order to modernize the nation’s refugee program, including modernizations such as but not limited to meeting

the urgent needs of a diverse refugee population through specialized and extended case management, culturally and linguistically appropriate mental health services, recertification assistance for refugees with a professional background, restoration of federal benefits from 8 months to at least one year, housing and transportation assistance, and other innovative policies that create sustainable integration pathways for refugees. (GC 12)

- Urge the U.S. government to extend the protection of asylum to vulnerable peoples, especially women fleeing mutilation or cultural practices that deny their full humanity. (EC 2/04)

The DREAM Act

The Development Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act would provide a path to legal status for undocumented youth who arrived in this country as infants or children and have grown up as members of our communities. The Episcopal Church strongly supports the DREAM Act. This act would provide immigrant youth the opportunity to pursue higher education and/or serve the United States so that they can become fully contributing members of our communities and eventually become citizens of the United States. Every child growing up in America deserves the opportunity to grow into full stature as a member of our society and to achieve his or her dreams. Withholding legal status from these children not only hurts them, but it deprives America of future generations of dedicated citizens, innovators, entrepreneurs and public servants.

Resolutions:

- Support federal legislation that presents a pathway to citizenship for undocumented youth and young adults while assisting undocumented youth, known as “DREAMers,” in accessing higher education. (GC 12)
- Urge the U.S. government to allow undocumented youth who arrive as infants or children to pursue higher education and/or serve in the military in order to contribute to their communities and become citizens. (GC 09)

Enforcement

The Episcopal Church supports common sense immigration enforcement policies that respect the dignity and worth of every human being. Those who break our immigration laws in order to do us harm need to be prevented from doing so, but the increased militarization of the border, programs that encourage racial profiling, and prison-like detention for migrants is not the solution. The Episcopal Church supports alternatives to costly and prison-like detention for individuals who pose no threat to public safety, and the end to programs that separate families and erode trust between law enforcement and immigrant communities, such as the 287-g and the Secure Communities program.

Resolutions:

- Decry the use of racial profiling as a reason to question an individual’s immigration status and call for the immediate end to the Secure Communities program which leads to lengthy detention of immigrants who have no serious charges against them and discourages victims of crimes, such as domestic abuse, from reporting those crimes. (GC 12)

- Urge the U.S. government to terminate any program that allows or funds local law enforcement agencies' enforcement of immigration law, thereby allowing immigrant victims of crime to report it without fear of deportation. (GC 09)
- Urge the U.S. government to establish a moratorium on roadside checkpoints and raids carried out by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) that tear families apart. (GC 09)
- Urge the U.S. government to ensure that undocumented immigrant detainees are provided with humane treatment, adequate food and medical care and sanitary conditions. (GC 09)
- Urge the U.S. government to consider alternatives to a costly prison-like detention system for immigrants. (GC 09)

Benefits for immigrants

The Episcopal Church believes that immigrants should not be unfairly barred from accessing benefits, such as coverage under the Affordable Care Act or federal student loans.

Resolutions:

- Urge U.S. government to ensure that needy immigrants are not unfairly denied essential services and benefits. (GC 97)
- Support a welfare system that does not discriminate on the basis of marital status, age, legal immigrant status or ability to identify other parent. (EC 2/95)

Your Neighbor-to-Neighbor Visit: BEFORE THE VISIT

1. **Organize a team:** Before you meet with your senators and representative, get a team together. A team ideally includes faith leaders, service providers and/or people whose lives have been directly impacted by the immigration system. Be strategic in finding team members who best represent your community's call for immigration reform and who can commit to building an ongoing relationship with your member of Congress plus community leaders who the senator or representative may already know and respect. Think of the impacted communities in your area—recent immigrant communities or congregations and [refugee communities](#) – reach out and ask a leader or representative from those communities to join your team.

Aim for 5-10 participants for a visit, though a larger group can be a powerful sign of support for the issue. If you are considering bringing a larger group, check with the member's scheduler to see how many people the office can accommodate, and be sure your meeting is well-planned so that you are focused on your message and everyone knows their specific role.

2. **Find out who represents you in Congress and get to know your audience:** Go to [www.senate.gov](#) and [www.house.gov](#) to find out who your senators and representative are. Find out where they stand on immigration, including past votes on pieces of immigration legislation that are important to you. Their websites and a quick Google search will show how they vote and what they have said about immigration, as well as biographical sketches, campaign statements, district demographics, occupation, religion, political and social memberships, areas of interest, and positions on other issues, all of which can inform your approach to the meeting. For specific bills, [www.thomas.loc.gov](#) is a good resource.

3. **Have a plan:** Meetings with decision makers should always be tied to your larger advocacy strategy, since meetings are just one of many activities important to winning humane immigration reform. Before you visit your members, *always* meet with the other participants to assign roles, including the facilitator, the personal story, specific issue points, and the “ask.” Practice by role-playing before the day of your meeting so that everyone feels comfortable with their role and knows what to do. Review your talking points and prepare your materials. Consider bringing materials such as statements from specific faith groups and news clippings of relevant local events.

Suggested Meeting Roles:

The Facilitator will kick off the meeting by introducing your group, explaining the purpose for the meeting, and providing space for each person attending to briefly introduce themselves. Make sure each participant introduces which congregation and/or organization they represent. The facilitator will also jump in if the meeting goes off-track and redirect the conversation.

The Personal Story is key to every meeting. Someone should be present who has either been directly impacted by the broken immigration system, or has worked closely with those who have been separated from family members by outdated or insufficient laws, have been or have had family members who have been detained, or whose family members have been deported. Telling this story will show how peoples’ lives are impacted and how **your community** needs immigration reform.

Specific Issue Points: There will be specific points your group will want to make about immigration reform, including, but not limited to, the importance of family unity and a pathway to full citizenship, and what those mean to your community. It will be helpful to have one person take on each of these issues to show they are distinctly important. Present a brief two minute reflection from a faith perspective on why immigrants’ rights are an important issue for your congregation.

The Ask is the critical part of the visit when you ask, “Can we count on your support for immigration reform that prioritizes family unity for all families and provides a pathway to full citizenship?” Listen carefully and ask for clarification if what they say is vague.

4. **Schedule a meeting.** Call, email, or fax the local offices of your senators and representatives to request a meeting with the member to discuss immigration. Make sure to tell them how many other faith leaders and community members would like to attend with you. If the member is unavailable, ask to meet with a staffer who works on immigration issues. Be persistent and don’t be discouraged if you need to follow-up in order to get a meeting scheduled.

Your Neighbor-to-Neighbor Visit: DURING THE VISIT

Below is a suggested framework, but please adapt it to fit your team, your stories and your member of Congress.

Introductions: The Facilitator should start the meeting by thanking the member for their time, introducing the group as a whole, and then having each person introduce themselves.

People of faith throughout _____ (town/city/state) are committed to acting out our faith by being good neighbors to immigrant families. We do this by _____

(Include a story of the work you or other faith groups in your community have done in support of immigrants – anything from ESL classes, to legal clinics, to advocacy, to other ministries.)

We count you, Senator/Representative _____, as our neighbor, too. We commend you for demonstrating the hospitality of our community by _____ (Find some comments or legislation the member has worked on in support of immigrant communities.)

We'd also like to ask how you plan to be a good neighbor to immigrant workers and families going forward, especially as we work toward immigration reform in 2013.

Personal Story: Share a personal story showing the need for immigration reform.

Specific Issue Points: Provide the member the materials you prepared and explain why specific issues, such as family unity and a path to full citizenship, are important to your communities.

Path to Full Citizenship – Currently, there are very few ways for someone who is undocumented, including undocumented youth, to become documented. Immigration reform must create a process by which undocumented immigrants can earn lawful permanent residency with a pathway to full citizenship. This would allow our immigrant neighbors who already contribute to our community to fully participate in our society with the same rights that we enjoy.

Family Unity – Families are the basic unit of strong communities. Thousands of families have been separated by detention and deportation, and should be reunited. Lengthy visa backlogs and the exclusion of same-sex partners and their families force people to choose between being separated for extended periods of time, illegally entering the country or being forced to choose between the people and the country they love. Immigration reform must strengthen the family immigration system for all families, including same gender domestic partners and spouses of U.S. citizens and LPRs.

Humanitarian Principles — Our current “enforcement first” model of immigration law has led to record deportations, record spending on interior enforcement and border security, and hundreds of thousands of families being torn apart. We seek an immigration system that recognizes inherent dignity of every human being, keeps humanitarian values at the center of our policies, and protects families from undue separation.

Make your ask: We believe that in order to truly be good neighbors to immigrants living and working in our communities, we must recognize the contributions and value they bring. Can we count on your support for immigration reform that prioritizes unity for all of our families and creates a pathway to full citizenship? How can we best support you in our mutual goal?

Listen well and take notes. Much of advocacy involves listening, providing opportunities for the member to ask questions, looking for indications of the member’s views, and finding opportunities to provide helpful information or correct misinformation. Members and staff will appreciate the chance to be heard instead of only being talked at. Ask questions and engage in conversation. Answer questions honestly. If you don’t know the answer, say that you don’t know but you will find out. Assign one person in the group to follow-up.

Leave Behind Materials: Bring with you educational information, policy recommendations, sign-on letters, charts, studies, faith resolutions, etc., all within a packet of resources to leave behind with the member's office.

Thank you and invitation to prayer vigil: Thank you for your time and support. We will be hosting a prayer vigil for immigration reform in the upcoming weeks. Can we count on your attendance? In the meantime, please let us know how we can be a support to you as we all come together in _____ (town/city/state) to be good neighbors and a welcoming community.

Remember to get the contact information and cards for the staffers you meet. Consider asking the member and staff to take a photo with your group – most politicians love the photo op!

Your Neighbor-to-Neighbor Visit: AFTER THE VISIT

Debrief your meeting

It's important to make sure you are all on the same page immediately after leaving the meeting, while the conversation is fresh in your mind. Make sure to leave the office building so your debrief conversation can't be overheard. As a group, review: What did we hear? Did we get what we wanted? What are the next steps? Choose one person to send a follow-up email attaching the documents mentioned, providing answers to questions that came up during the meeting, and continuing to engage the member and staff in your group's work. It's also important to evaluate your group's work. How did we do as a team? Share the information learned during your meeting with your state coalition and other allies.

Communicate with your base

Make sure to take notes and report back how the meeting went to other groups with whom you are working with. The information from your meeting will inform your next steps on strategic action and is important for those who couldn't come to the meeting to feel included in the process.

Follow up with your member of Congress

Send the staff you met an email thanking them for their time, attaching any documents you mentioned, providing answers to questions that came up during the meeting, and once again making your case for humane immigration reform.

Call Washington, DC

Call the Interfaith Immigration call-in line at 1-866-940-2439 or the Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121 to be connected to the DC offices of your senators and representatives. Introduce yourself as a constituent and ask for the staffer who works on immigration. Tell them about your meeting with their local office, ask what they are doing to champion immigration reform, and urge them to support humane immigration policies. Oftentimes the local and DC offices do not communicate about visits, so it's important to follow up with the DC office as well.

Let us know how your visit went

It's very important for us to continue to gather information about where your members stand on immigration reform. After you meet or speak with someone from your senators' and representatives' local and/or DC offices, please fill out this feedback form:

www.interfaithimmigration.org/state-resources/register-in-district-visits-to-lawmakers-on-cir.

Our staff in the Office of Government Relations in DC and our interfaith partners can then follow up with the DC staff to reinforce your visit and to make sure we have an accurate vote count for immigration reform!

Prayer Vigils for Family Unity & Immigration Reform

Why host a prayer vigil?

Hosting prayer vigils around the country provides people of faith an opportunity to reflect on the deep scriptural, spiritual roots of our work to support immigrants' rights and highlight the real-life consequences of our failed policies. Family Unity Vigils are part of a larger strategy to express to our elected officials in Congress that humane immigration reform is a top priority for people of faith.

Everyone, lay and ordained, new to this ministry of action or a seasoned advocate, from the smallest congregation to large congregations, can be a part of this nationwide effort to see just, proportional, and humane immigration reform.

Some options for involvement include:

- Coordinate a public prayer vigil with other places of worship, inviting community members and your senators and representatives. Publicize it through bulletins, websites and flyers.
- Plan a prayer vigil for your faith community, and invite an immigrant to share how their lives would be impacted by immigration reform. Invite your senators, representatives and local press outlets.
- Add a focus on immigration to an existing event—community meal, ESL classes, or a discussion for your faith community. Let your senators, representatives and local press know you're doing it!
- Invite Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM) staff, former refugees, and refugee communities to share their experiences and join your event. They can offer service expertise and firsthand stories of migration, the immigration system, and strong demonstrations of community support.
 - [Click here](#) to see a list of EMM's 31 locations- one may be near you!
- Encourage/offer a sermon, litany or another major focus on immigration in worship. Let your senators and representatives know—share the bulletin or text of the sermon with them, or maybe even invite them to worship with you.
- Include a prayer petition about immigration within worship services, during community gatherings, or around other social times, providing community members opportunities to write letters or leave voice messages for your senators or representatives.

Whatever form your event takes, your prayers and action will be joined and magnified through the prayers and actions of other people of faith around the country.

Immigration reform is a large task with many complex components, but you do not need to be an immigration lawyer or a policy wonk to be an effective and forceful advocate. Speak from your personal experience and the experience of your community and, when looking for overarching themes, we suggest the following:

1. Humane immigration reform is reform that prioritizes family unity, provides a fair and accessible pathway to full citizenship, offers protection to vulnerable migrants such as refugees and takes a proportional approach to enforcement.
2. Empowerment of people of faith to speak out more boldly for immigrants' rights.
3. Moral courage for members of Congress to show leadership by voting for immigration reform.

Register Your Event Now by filling out this form: <http://wp.me/p2MCxv-bh> Registered events will show up as candles on a map showing the hundreds of similar events happening around the country. You can also use the calendar to find out who else is planning events in your area.

Registering your event is IMPORTANT — it helps us track and connect people to you and provides information so that other immigrant advocates in your town know how to get involved. Even a small event, multiplied around the country, will send a powerful message to our representatives in Congress that immigration reform is a moral issue that is important to people of faith and conscience.

Planning your prayer vigil

Before planning an event, it's helpful to define your goals. Who do you want to reach? What specifically do you want this event to accomplish? Examples include: "We want 100 people to sign a postcard to their member of congress" or "We want media coverage to show that the people of faith want immigration reform." Make sure that all speakers find a way to incorporate this vision into their prayers, songs, etc.

To make your vigil effective in convincing decision-makers to vote for humane immigration reform that prioritizes family unity and provides a pathway to full citizenship:

- Identify your senators and representatives who need to hear that people of faith support immigration reform, and research their faith background to reach out to leaders of that tradition
- Host your vigil in a strategic location, such as in front of their local offices
- Include the senators' and representatives' names in the materials and event program
- Make and display signs that have your message for full citizenship and family unity
- Invite interfaith partners to join your event
- Invite service providers such as Episcopal Migration Ministries staff, [local legal service providers](#), and community organizations
- Invite the local media – this will help decision-makers know this is important
- Take pictures; write Letters to the Editor, Opinion Editorials and blog posts; post on Facebook and send press clips to the decision-maker when you set up a meeting with them

Drawing on Symbolic and Creative Traditions

A prayer vigil for immigration reform should showcase your Episcopal faith or, if applicable, show the diversity of faiths present. Rather than asking participants to only use interfaith language, encouraging all participants to pray in their own faith tradition and voice can add power to a prayer vigil. The set-up for the vigil should ensure that all faiths are respected and welcomed with awareness and consciousness.

Drawing on faith traditions and rituals can make vigils much more powerful, thereby raising the creative and dramatic tension. Use images and symbolism that draw attention and showcase the powerful solidarity people of faith show in working for immigration reform. Here are some examples:

- Ask Clergy attending to wear collars, stoles, robes and any other appropriate attire
- Foot washing of individuals impacted by immigration policies
- Procession with candles to symbolic location
- A Prayer Wall with handwritten prayers for family unity and full citizenship
- Utilize special events (e.g. Valentines with hearts that say “love thy neighbor”)
- Invite lawmakers to read scriptures/sacred texts supportive of immigrants’ rights
- Lift up stories from community members and compare them to stories in sacred texts
- Highlight passages in scripture and present them to members of congress
- Collect and deliver prayers for humane immigration reform to your senators and representatives
- Make visuals – photos, drawings, art, etc. that show the consequences of immigration enforcement policies and family separation

Planning Checklist

4 to 6 weeks before your event

- ____ Organize a team of congregants, faith leaders, and community members to help plan the event.
- ____ Set a date and time. Keep the length of the vigil realistic, as even an hour can be a large time commitment for some. Consider what time of day will best serve your purpose.
- ____ Invite your senators and representatives using the below sample invitation letter. If your member cannot attend, make sure they receive the press releases and coverage.
- ____ Secure a location that will be accessible to those attending and strategic in getting the attention of your members of congress. Apply for any permits needed for the location; reserve or order any equipment you’ll need, such as microphones, cameras, banners, candles, and projectors; and make sure you can access electrical outlets.
- ____ Choose a time of day best for attendance and media (6pm works well for the evening news)
- ____ Invite speakers. Are there prominent faith leaders in your community who could offer a prayer? Who might serve well as a leader/emcee to get the vigil started? Leaders from impacted immigrant and refugee communities?
- ____ Remember to register your prayer event at [interfaithimmigration.org!](http://interfaithimmigration.org)

2 to 3 weeks before your event

- ____ Create promotional materials and invite people through word of mouth, newsletters, bulletins, websites, social media, and listservs. Distribute event information to other organizations to get the word out.
- ____ Gather the equipment you’ll need—sound equipment, extension cords, chairs (especially for the elderly), a projector, etc. Might people need water or warm beverages?

— Go over vigil program and identify the appropriate prayers and speakers. It's good to have just a few speakers to lead, but plan for many participants to offer short prayers.

— Make sure you have all equipment ready for the next day, your speakers and the emcee for your event are prepared, and everyone knows their role (sign-in table, taking pictures, handing out programs, welcoming press and handing out news releases).

— Prepare a sign-in sheet so you can continue to communicate with participants after the event.

The day of your event

— Arrive early—give yourself and your team plenty of time to set-up sound equipment, tables, etc.

— Greet participants, give them a copy of the program and ask them to sign up for future updates.

— Greet reporters, give them your press release and ask them to sign in (name, media outlet, email address and phone number) to follow up and to establish relationships for the next event.

After the event

Send thank you notes, photos, video, and press clips from your event to attendees and your senators and representatives. Consider writing a blog post and share it on your website or at the EPPN website: <http://episcopal.grassroots.com/stories>

Below is one example of how a vigil might be ordered, but your program may look very different—consider the resources within your community or core planning group (an exceptional church choir or cantor, local poet, sign language translator, artist, etc.), and use them to plan your vigil program.

Welcome—A few words about the focus and purpose of your vigil. Why now? What's the concern? Who's affected? How can this vigil convince your members of congress to support humane immigration reform? What values shape your faith traditions' response to these concerns? This may take the form of brief comments from one of your speakers, or a welcome and an opening prayer.

Opening Prayer: Ask clergy or key lay leader to open with a prayer.

Song—A singer, choir or instrumentalist can perform, or a few singers can lead participants in singing.

Reading—For ideas see suggested readings below.

Speaker—A personal story from a local community member of how the broken immigration system has impacted families. More than one story can be integrated throughout the program as well.

Creative Ritual—Integrate creative symbols or rituals from faith traditions that draw more attention to the importance of immigration reform (see above suggestions).

Prayer—One person may lead the prayers, or you might invite several faith leaders to pray according to their traditions. Involve vigil participants in praying a refrain throughout your prayer time, or pray in a circle so everyone has the opportunity to pray. Consider offering prayers in multiple languages.

Song & Closing—Reiterate the focus and purpose of your vigil, and send participants off with a call to welcome newcomers and raise their voices in the public sphere for compassionate immigration reform. Consider a procession or march to another symbolic and strategic location.

Sample Invite to Your Member of Congress

Dear Honorable Senator / Representative,

We would like to invite you to attend [CONREGATION]'s prayer vigil on [DATE] at

[LOCATION]. The event is part of a national faith movement to see comprehensive immigration reform this year and to stand with our immigrant brothers and sisters with prayer vigils, potlucks and congressional visits taking place in communities around the country.

Families are the basic unit of strong communities. Thousands of families have been separated by detention and deportation, and should be reunited. As people of faith, we cannot sit by as families are torn apart. If we do not reform our immigration system, we risk further destruction in our communities.

We hope you will join us at this vigil to pray for immigration reform that reunites families and provides a pathway to full citizenship for undocumented immigrants. We will also be praying for moral courage for our leaders in Congress to enact such reform.

We encourage you to join faith and community leaders in [DISTRICT] to stand up for immigration policies that prioritize family unity and treat all people with dignity and respect. Please contact [CONTACT NAME] at [NUMBER] to RSVP or for additional information.

Thank you,
 [List all vigil organizers]

Suggested Readings

The Hebrew Bible tells us: "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." (Lev 19:33-34)

In the New Testament, Jesus tells us to welcome the stranger, "for just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." (Matthew 25:40)

The Qur'an tells us that we should "serve God...and do good to...orphans, those in need, neighbors who are near, neighbors who are strangers, the companion by your side, the wayfarer that you meet, and those who have nothing." (4:36)

The Hindu scripture Taitiriya Upanishad tells us: "The guest is a representative of God." (1.11.2)

"Why should you not hate the stranger? asks the Torah. Because you once stood where he stands now. You know the heart of the stranger because you were once a stranger in the land of Egypt...G-d made you into the world's archetypal strangers so that you would fight for the rights of strangers – for your own and those others, wherever they are, whatever the colour of their skin or the nature of their culture, because, though they are not in your image – says G-d – they are nonetheless in Mine. There is only one reply strong enough to answer the question: Why should I not hate the stranger? Because the stranger is me." --Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the (British) Commonwealth

"The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him yourself, for you were strangers in the Land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God." (Lev 19:34)

"Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured." (Hebrews 13:1-3)

"This law of shielding the alien from all wrong is of vital significance in the history of religion. With it alone true Religion begins. The alien was to be protected, not because he was a member of one's family, clan, religious community, or people; but because he was a human being. In the alien, therefore, man discovered the idea of humanity." --German-Jewish philosopher Hermann Cohen (Dr JH Hertz, Pentateuch & Haftorahs, The Soncino Press, 1960, Pg 313.)

"We bid you welcome, who come with weary spirit seeking rest. Who come with troubles that are too much with you, who come hurt and afraid. We bid you welcome, who come with hope in your heart. Who come with anticipation in your step; who come proud and joyous. We bid you welcome, who are seekers of a new faith, Who come to probe and explore, who come to learn. We bid you welcome, who enter this hall as a homecoming, Who have found here room for your spirit, who find in these people a family. Whoever you are, whatever you are, wherever you are in your journey, We bid you welcome." (We Bid You Welcome, by Richard S. Gilbert, reading number #442 from Singing the Living Tradition)

"... I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me...just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." --Matthew 25:35-40

Making YOUR Voice Heard in Town Halls

During the August recess many members of Congress host Town Hall Meetings in their district. Open to the public, these meetings are a chance for members to hear directly from their constituents about the key issues before Congress. This August, immigration reform is likely to be a frequently discussed topic, and we already know that anti-immigrant groups will be present. That is why we need to make sure that our representatives hear **LOUD** and **CLEAR** that we, as Episcopalians and people of faith, want to see comprehensive and compassionate immigration reform **this year**. By asking questions about immigrants' rights, we will remind both representatives and those attending that "welcoming the stranger" is not only important to people of faith but to our nation as a whole. When representatives know that their constituents support a strong stance in favor of immigration reform, it encourages them to prioritize this issue and to vote in favor of citizenship! The August recess is so important precisely because of these moments where the electorate has the chance to change a representative's or senator's mind on an issue.

Follow these easy steps to get involved:

1. **Call your Representative** to ask when and where their Town Halls will be held. Preliminary List: www.interfaithimmigration.org/2013/07/24/list-of-town-hall-meetings.

2. Invite other community members who care about immigration reform to attend with you. Make signs, wear t-shirts, and find creative ways to visually display that you are a person of faith who supports immigration reform.
3. Get there early and sit near microphones. Don't all sit together — it will help show that there is not just one group that supports immigration reform, but many from all over the community.
4. Prepare your question(s) ahead of time and write them down, in case they only take written questions. Have some facts at your fingertips and include them when you ask your questions, along with a story about why you care or of someone who is impacted in your community.
5. Raise your hand to ask a question and keep your hand up until they give you time to speak. Find a way to be heard by cheering for others' questions, making a lot of noise in order for them to give you time to speak, and talking with the representative or their staff afterwards, emphasizing that you and many people of faith want to see immigration reform.

If you would like additional background materials, information on your representative's stance, or assistance formulating questions, please contact kconway@episcopalchurch.org.

Signs of Change

The Interfaith Immigration Coalition is putting out a call to all congregations to use the traditional American "church sign" to build community support for and direct attention to the issue of immigration reform!

Faith communities will be encouraged to come up with – and photograph – a unique and compelling message in support of immigration reform on their sign. Congregations that do not have "movable type" signs are also encouraged to get a creative sign printed and displayed in front of their house of worship.

Once your sign is up, please share it with us (kconway@episcopalchurch.org) and we can add it to the IIC website. As the church sign photos are shared online, individuals will be encouraged to vote for their favorite photo and message by sharing the image on Facebook and Twitter. In addition, congregations, denominations and organizations can engage their members to share and vote for images in order to spread the message even further to their networks of friends.

Below are examples of signs to help inspire you to craft your own message. While not all are about immigration, they provide examples of how creative signs can send a strong message!



This document was last updated on August 14, 2013