

IMMIGRANT NEIGHBORS: Discussion Guide

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Approach #1:

Commitment to Neighbors and Immigrant Families

California is an immigrant state, so we need to learn to love and serve our neighbors. “Who is my neighbor?” We must answer this question as citizens and as Christians, recognizing that how we treat our neighbor ultimately says more about us than it does about them.

What Could Be Done?

- Provide social service support for immigrant families, on-going case management, financial assistance, and family reunification
- Extend hospitality to all neighbors, creating safe places for immigrants to gather for healthy social events
- Provide “Sanctuary” services in formal and informal programs to protect immigrants from deportation
- Support refugee sponsorship efforts to those fleeing political oppression and economic hardship
- Advocate for higher immigration levels by the U.S. government

Those Who Support This Approach Say...

- On balance, the cultural and economic benefits we get from immigrants more than outweigh the short-term costs
- Simple decency ought to require us to take in people fleeing political persecution and economic hardship
- Immigrants are highly motivated people who contribute to the economy with their entrepreneurial activity and hard work
- Hospitality is how we practice our faith...we're called to extend this practice into the lives of immigrants, no matter how they got here

Those Who Oppose This Approach Say...

- Our first obligation is to provide jobs and social services for people already living in this country. We cannot afford to help everyone who wants to come
- In the past, waves of immigrants were followed by periods where the rules were tightened up. We need a breathing space to absorb the immigrants we already have
- Amnesty programs reward people for breaking the law

Approach #2:

Multi-Cultural Partnerships Enrich Our Lives

We will never have a healthy multi-cultural society without a knowledge and appreciation of racial, ethnic and immigrant cultures. We must be genuinely interested in our neighbors to create and to grow new partnerships among diverse populations.

What Could Be Done?

- Devote time, space and money to support multi-cultural celebrations, especially for immigrant neighbors
- Provide bilingual education in schools and adult literacy classes for adults to make multi-cultural partnerships more effective
- Create community service projects with multi-cultural participation to overcome damaging stereotypes by working together
- Permit communities to customize school curricula and textbooks to reflect their unique values, history and culture
- Create a truly multi-cultural church

Those Who Support This Approach Say...

- Historically, there have always been dire predictions that immigrants are "too different" and won't integrate into society. They were wrong then and they're wrong now
- Experience shows that while some first generation immigrants don't master English, the second generation is almost always fluent
- Cultural spaces in cities like a "Little Vietnam" or "Little Italy" provide a safe place for assimilation
- A truly multi-cultural church could lead by example as communities struggle to integrate immigrants into the fabric of life

Those Who Oppose This Approach Say...

- Most countries insist that immigrants enter the cultural mainstream by learning their language, so we should too
- Immigrants need to learn how to live in American culture rather than cling to their past culture if they want to be Americans now
- This will result in more separation and less contact with members of other ethnic and immigrant groups, and that will increase conflict

Approach #3:

Economic Opportunities for All...Immigrants Too

Our economy's stability and strength is weakened by economic inequalities that make the 'American dream' nearly impossible for many of our racial, ethnic and immigrant neighbors. We must offer serious opportunities and social mobility to all Americans.

What Could Be Done?

- Provide tax breaks, incentives, and loans to give immigrant and ethnic enterprises an opportunity to develop and prosper
- Encourage friends to join you in giving your business to immigrant shops and services
- Work for a 'living wage' for all citizens, making sure immigrants are included
- Offer business mentoring to immigrant start-up ventures with assistance in best practices and labor regulations
- Support the expansion of H-1B visas for immigrant workers in technical jobs to strengthen U.S. companies

Those Who Support This Approach Say...

- Immigrants open businesses, create jobs, pay taxes, and bring needed skills to U.S. companies
- Immigrant entrepreneurs enrich our neighborhoods with ethnic foods and more choices in products and services
- H-1B visas allow immigrants to work in the U.S. in jobs that Americans are not fully prepared to fill
- "It's the economy first!" Those who really believe our economy is the essential engine of our country will welcome everyone who wants to contribute...unconditionally

Those Who Oppose This Approach Say...

- Not all immigrants are employable, so some become a burden on public services and our public health system
- Employers should be responsible for the social and public cost when immigrants aren't self-sufficient
- We need to meet our U.S. job needs without continued H-1B visa dependence on immigrants who don't want to assimilate into our American culture