



Engaging Your Faith Community on Immigration: First Steps for Organizing and Action by Small Groups in Religious Settings

Are you curious about how to start organizing for immigrant justice within your faith community? Perhaps you're looking for suggestions on how to follow up education with action? Are you excited to get started putting your newfound knowledge into practice? This brief guide may be for you! Read on to find quick steps to get your group engaged and involved!

Step One: Begin with your faith community! Begin and close each meeting with prayer. Spend time engaging the mystics & activists in your group.

- What values and tenets of your faith tradition call you to answer the injustices immigrants face? What motivates your faith community? What kinds of activities do you enjoy doing together? (service learning, field trips, making meals together, praying, multigenerational activities, etc.)
- Are there existing social justice, youth, service, social, or study groups within your community that might be interested in partnering with you?
- Are there cultural or faith events or holidays in your religious or liturgical calendar that celebrate migrations? Would those be good opportunities to draw a parallel?

Step Two: Start reaching out to immigrant and refugee groups in your area!

- Find out what organizations in your local area are in touch with immigrants. Schools and service organizations are good places to start, as well as getting in touch with your [local American Friends Service Committee \(AFSC\) office](#) to see if there are any immigrant and refugee rights groups that they work with in your area.
- Talk with immigrant organizations to find out how you can best accompany the immigrant community. How could your faith community serve in helping to fill the need? (offering English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes or child care during meetings, accompaniment, raising money for legal costs, writing letters of support, supporting planned events, etc.)

Step Three: Take steps to add a faith voice to the immigrant movement! You can help balance the debate and give your representative the courage to stand up for justice. Sign up on the (AFSC) listserv to stay updated on the latest legislation at the State and Federal levels. THEN:

- Take your group to visit with your state and federal elected officials
- Host letter writing parties at your faith community (<http://www.afsc.org/document/congressional-letter-writing-house-party-toolkit>)
- Write letters to the editor in support of immigrants (Contact Jordan for help starting a letter to the editor ladder jgarcia@afsc.org)
- Hold public faith events and invite the press (such as vigils, public prayers, rallies, fasts etc.)



Step Four: Create events and interactive experiences for members of your faith community!

- Start a theatre group to act out different immigration stories for your community. Try holding a discussion after each performance – a great activity for youth groups!
- Invite your whole faith community to do a retreat or dinner series.
- Learning Fasts: Call people together to fast for a whole day. Have each person research where the food they would have eaten comes from. Where was it grown? Who picked it? How was it shipped and by whom? How much was each person involved paid for their work?
- Meditations, Intentions, or Prayers for immigrant detainees and their families as well as our society and government.
- If there is a detention center near you, organize a trip for your community to bear witness to the conditions of immigrant detentions. Sponsor a vigil.
- Organize a group from your faith community to join the Migrant Trail Walk. Join Derechos Humanos for the 75-mile journey from Sásabe, Sonora to Tucson, Arizona in solidarity with migrant sisters and brothers who have walked this trail and lost their lives. Bear witness to the lives that are lost, the families who mourn, and the communities that suffer the divisions that borders wreak on all of us. (<http://derechoshumanosaz.net/2011/01/migranttrail>)

Step Five: Plan events and do service work that engages your community in companionship!

- Do a community-wide drive for items needed by people detained in an immigration detention center near you.
- Offer English and Spanish classes through your faith community.
- Support a local immigrant rights group by offering childcare during their meetings or through fundraising.
- Start or join a detention visitation group. To find out if there's a visitation program in your state, contact NCastro@endisolation.org.
- Fasting for justice and reflection: Use a fasting journal like this one from AFSC (<http://afsc.org/document/fast-immigrant-justice-interfaith-reflection-journal>)

Step Six: Speak out about your work and engage members of your larger faith community!

- Write articles for your faith organization's newsletter or bulletin. Or start a simple one of your own.
- Does your faith community have a blog or website? This is a great place to start posting thought provoking articles and draw attention to how the mainstream media portrays immigrants.
- Write stories about your experiences from engaging steps 1-5. Tell how they have changed your mind, heart, and soul. Talk about how doing immigration justice work is central to your faith. Lift up opportunities for more people in your faith community to get involved!

Step Seven: Support local immigrants and groups by raising money!