

Witnessing to Immigrants

by Kathy Bernard

Imagine that you just stepped onto American soil for the first time to begin a new chapter in your life. You have come from a far-off land where you spoke a different language and lived in a very different way than most of the people in your new country.

How would you feel? Scared? Lonely? Confused? The millions of immigrants in the United States likely feel all of these emotions and more. Some governmental and social agencies help them get acclimated, but such agencies cannot begin to fully address all of the scared, lonely, and confused feelings that our new neighbors may have. That's where you can play a huge role in not only helping immigrants adjust to their new country, but in witnessing to them about the hope found only in Jesus and inviting them into fellowship at your church.

Tips:

Remember ... Christ has commanded his followers to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). *All nations means our nation, too!*

Relax ... the burden of the immigrants' salvation *is not yours to bear*. As it says in the Third Article of *Luther's Small Catechism*, “I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me [and others in the faith] by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.”

Remind yourself of the awesome salvation message that you can share with newcomers through the power of the Holy Spirit. As it says in Ephesians 2:18-20, “For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, [they] are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.”

Rejoice ... God has “equipped you with everything good for doing his will, and [will] work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever” (Hebrews 13:21).

Resources:

[The LHM Online Store](#) offers printed Bible studies and booklets in several languages to assist you in your outreach efforts to immigrants. Visit www.lhmgift.org/storefront/.

LHM has free online information about how to handle stress, loneliness, and other universal concerns, that you can download and share in English or Spanish. Visit

www.lhmint.org/freebies/default.htm. There are dozens of other topics addressed (in English) that can be found at www.lhm.org/topicalmessages.htm.

Learn how immigrants feel about life in America. Read "[Now That I'm Here: What America's Immigrants Have to Say About Life in the U.S. Today](#)".

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service welcomes and advocates for immigrants. Visit <http://www.lirs.org/>.

[International Institute of St. Louis](#) provides links to national immigrant resources. Visit <http://www.iistl.org/resources/index.asp>. To find agencies that assist immigrants in your area, go to www.google.com, and then type your city name and "immigration services" or "immigration ministries" into the search box.

Practice:

Don't be shy – dive in: Typically immigrants are open to meeting people – they want to make new friends!

- 1) Don't let a lack of knowledge about their country or language keep you from trying. Smile broadly, put your hand out to shake their hand, and tell them your name.
- 2) Ask them their name and repeat it. If it is difficult to pronounce, keep trying until they tell you you've got it right. (Write it down as soon as you can after the encounter)
- 3) Explain where you are from. Speak slowly and clearly (but not loudly!) For example, say, "Hi, I'm _____, I'm from _____ Lutheran Church in (city)."
- 4) Ask if they are new to the area. This encourages them to say where they are from and how long they have lived in the area.
- 5) If they identify what country they are from, respond by saying something positive about the country. If you don't know anything about their country, say, "I've heard of _____, but I know very little about it. I'd love to learn more about your country."

Empathize with what they are going through:

- 1) Say, "What has it been like adjusting to living in this country?"
- 2) Listen to their answers, summarize what they have said, and then respond with solutions to help them in their situation. Example: "Have you heard of _____ (organization)? They help people dealing with that concern." (See the resources listed above)

Invite them to worship with you

- 1) Invite them to your church and explain to them why it is a friendly place to learn about Jesus, God's only Son, who came to earth to love and bring hope to people like you and them.
- 2) Write your name, phone number, and your church's name, address, and phone number on a piece of paper, along with the church service times (or, better yet, have the information typed up ahead of time so you are ready for such encounters). Hand them the paper and make sure they understand what you have written. Seek to get their phone number and address.
- 3) Set a firm time to meet at the church so you can sit together during worship and Sunday school class.
- 4) When they come to church, introduce them to the pastor, Sunday school teacher, and church members.
- 5) Invite them to come again. Call or write to them later in the week to let them know how much you enjoyed being with them and how much Christ loves them.
- 6) Pray for your newfound friends and for the challenges that they encounter as an immigrant. Pray that they would come to understand the hope that can only be found in Jesus and that they would feel led to become a part of your church.
- 7) Realize that forming relationships takes time. You need to earn their trust before such friendships can bear fruit and your church needs to learn how to reach out warmly to newcomers before visitors will truly feel welcome.

Try, try again. Realize that not everyone you invite will visit your church, particularly not the first time you ask.

- 1) If they don't show up, send them a note saying that you missed seeing them and that you hope they will join you on another day. Remind them you care about them because of Christ living and working in you.
- 2) Seek to set a new, firm date for them to visit your church.
- 3) Send occasional cards and notes letting them know that they are in your prayers and that they are always welcome to visit your church or to call you.
- 4) Look for opportunities to see them again and to strengthen your relationship.

Conclusion:

Reaching out to immigrants presents unique challenges, such as cultural differences and language barriers, but it also provide enormous opportunities to share Christ's message of hope with the world ... without ever leaving your hometown.

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