



Summary of the Interfaith Youth Core's *Stranger to Neighbor* Training

In 1970, Rochester, Minnesota had only 157 citizens of minority races/ethnicities. Since then, the city has seen major waves of immigration from Southeast Asia, Somalia and Sudan, bringing Vietnamese Buddhists, Hmong traditionalists, Somali Muslims and Sudanese Christians. Immigration brought not only racial and ethnic diversity, but religious diversity as well. Rochester's school districts now report that 28% of their student body identifies in a minority identity category. In May 2009, Interfaith Youth Core staff met with Rochester's Mayor, Chief of Police, and Superintendent of Schools who told us that religious identity is now a stronger factor in school bullying and hate crime incidents. Of particular concern, they said, is that it is broadly acceptable to dislike or fear Muslims, a reality they attribute to stories told in the media. These stories impact not only the majority population's relationship with Somali Muslims, but also with Sudanese residents who, though they are Christian, are assumed to be Muslim. Rochester is looking for a better way to handle the way their citizens welcome these strangers and they want to make sure that way does not ignore religion.

Context of Initiative:

The United States is currently home to the largest population of immigrants in the world. Since the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, the United States has become the most religiously diverse country in the world. This dramatic shift in the cultural, ethnic, and religious identity of America has been met with both significant welcome, and strong, sometimes violent resistance. Many established communities across the country are currently experiencing the timeless challenge of integrating new immigrants. While the nation again prepares for an important conversation regarding needed changes to our current immigration policy, IFYC recognizes that the essential, though often over-looked work of education and relationship-building between immigrants and non-immigrants will result in a stronger, healthier country. We believe one of the most effective ways to build a diverse, yet increasingly united America is through *religious pluralism*. Religious pluralism is a form of proactive cooperation that affirms individual identities while emphasizing that the well-being of each depends on the health of the whole. Religious pluralism consists of three primary building blocks: respect for diverse identities, mutually inspiring relationships, and common action for the common good. Building upon the shared values of welcoming and hospitality in all religious traditions, faith communities can play a leading role by working together to foster a community atmosphere of mutual respect, friendship and service that transforms the “*stranger*” to neighbor.

With this goal in mind, IFYC is pleased to present its *Stranger to Neighbor* training. This custom-made training seeks to facilitate an environment of openness and honesty, while emphasizing the tools of education, storytelling, community assessment and service. The interactive, multi-media training consists of both large and small group work, and is best suited for faith communities, high school/university student groups, immigration organizations, and any other community stakeholders that would like to benefit from the skills of interfaith organizing and collaboration to build bridges of peace and trust between people of



faith, and their community neighbors. This training is appropriate for most ages, and groups between 20 to 50 people. It requires at least a half-day to complete (though a full-day training would be more productive), and should end with a process of outreach, welcome and potential partnership between numerous diverse members of the local campus/community.

Outline of Stranger to Neighbor Training:

Introduction to religious pluralism, and the urgency of interfaith cooperation (video clip from CNN's "God's Warriors", and discussion on "Ground Zero Interfaith Center/Mosque" issue)

Brief introduction on urgency of addressing current issues around immigration (including interview clips of Dream Act students, and clips from documentary, *In the Shadow of the Raid*) and importance of young religious voice (small group discussion on recent NYT's article *A Generation Gap Over Immigration*)

Sharing of participants faith, ancestry, and personal experience of migration, and importance of personal story (video clip from PBS series, "*The Faces of America*," and the beginning of construction of *Stranger to Neighbor* story)

Overview of the history of immigration in the US, particularly through the lens of religious communities (significant powerpoint presentation in which participants are asked to make parallels to our current reality)

Push/Pull factors, and the stories of immigrants (video clips from the PBS series, "*The New Americans*," and migration story from local recent immigrant)

Development of religious/ethical voice around immigration through scripture and story (Shared religious value of welcoming the stranger document, and continuing construction of *Stranger to Neighbor* story)

Concrete examples of young religious individuals and religious communities throughout the US living out the ethic of welcoming the stranger, and how to connect to local, regional and national interfaith immigration initiatives (examples include Welcoming America, Interfaith Immigration Coalition, and numerous local initiatives)

Presentation on the qualities of a young interfaith leader (Speak out, Take action and Inspire others), and introduction to Interfaith Youth Core's year-long "*Better Together - Stranger to Neighbor*" campaign

Practice interfaith cooperation around immigration through one of three case studies (LA Times article, *A Modern Tale of Meatpacking and Immigrants* in Grand Island, NB, or *Neuvo South*, radio documentary on the integration of immigrants in Siler City, NC, or clips from movie documentary *Welcome to Shelbyville*, based on "welcoming campaign" in Shelbyville, TN)

What's Next!? (Local campus/community assessment, Proactive vs. Reactive initiatives, Setting goals)



Important Notes and Contact Information:

- Not all participant groups will have the same level of cultural or religious diversity. This should not hinder any group from utilizing the training. We will gladly work with each group to adapt the training to their own community context.
- Not all participants will have the same level of cultural or religious knowledge. This is not an issue, as participants are all in the same space to learn together.
- In general, we would like to work with a local team prior to the training to custom fit the training for its audience, and draw from the resources of a local college/university, as well as from the local immigrant community as much as possible.
- Additionally, IFYC staff is excited to work with interested participants after the training for more in-depth “next steps” work, and consultative follow-up.
- Finally, IFYC recognizes the complex nature of the immigration conversation taking place in communities across the country, and is prepared for the strong questions, comments, and emotional responses that often accompany this issue. While understanding America as an immigrant country, and respecting the dignity and worth of every human being, IFYC does not take a policy stance regarding immigration reform, but rather focuses on creating a safe and open space where storytelling, relationship-building and community service can begin and be strengthened for the betterment of the local community and its diverse people.

IFYC’s *Stranger to Neighbor* outreach, education and training work is funded through a generous grant, making the training and consultation possible at a pro-rated cost to interested communities, schools and/or organizations. To schedule a training, or to address any questions, please email or call IFYC *Stranger to Neighbor* outreach and education trainer, Rev. David Fraccaro at davidf@ifyc.org, or 312-573-8832.

News Articles, Website Resource List, and Further Reading:

Religion, Values, and Immigration Reform - Public Religion Research Institute, research conducted March 5-11th, 2010, <http://www.publicreligion.org/research/?id=279>

A Tale of Meatpacking and Immigrants - LA Times, January 28th, 2010, <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/jan/28/nation/la-na-immigrant-nebraska28-2010jan28>

A Generation Gap Over Immigration - NY Times, May 17th, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/18/us/18divide.html?_r=1

Nuevo South - NPR radio documentary, http://cds.aas.duke.edu/audio/nuevo_south/nuevo_south.mp3

The New Americans - PBS documentary series, <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/newamericans/>

Faces of America - PBS documentary series, <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/facesofamerica/>

Welcome to Shelbyville - movie documentary, <http://www.activevoice.net/>



The Interfaith Youth Core, www.ifyc.org

IFYC Bridge-Builders Network, <http://bridge-builders.ning.com/>

Interfaith Immigration Coalition, <http://www.interfaithimmigration.org/>

Christians for Comprehensive Immigration Reform, www.faithandimmigration.org

Welcoming America, <http://www.welcomingamerica.org/>

Ellis Island Website, <http://www.ellisland.org/>

A New Religious America: How a “Christian Country” Has Become the World’s Most Religiously Diverse Nation (Diana L. Eck, HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 2001)

God Needs No Passport: Immigration and the Changing American Religious Landscape (Peggy Levitt, The New Press, 2007)

Sacred Assemblies and Civic Engagement: How Religion Matters for America’s Newest Immigrants (Fred Kniss and Paul D. Numrich, Rutgers University Press, 2007)

God’s Heart Has No Borders: How Religious Activists are Working for Immigrant Rights (Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, University of California Press, 2008)

Parade of Faiths: Immigration and American Religion (Jenna Weissman Joselit, Oxford University Press, 2008)

Strangers as Neighbors: Religious Language and the Response to Immigrants in the United States (Fairfield University, White Paper Collection from the Center for Faith and Public Life, 2009)