

Immigration through the Lens of Faith



Organizing an Interfaith Delegation to Your Member of Congress

Our religious traditions teach us to welcome the stranger, “for you were once a stranger.” In that spirit, Interfaith Worker Justice (IWJ) invites you to organize an interfaith delegation to your representative. These delegations should focus on two main concerns:

- Comprehensive Immigration Reform must be enacted at the national level, to help those who have lived, worked and paid taxes in this country for years to come out of the shadows and have a path to legalization and citizenship
- We must restore civility in the debate about immigration reform.

The Meeting

The meeting will allow the representative to hear and consider the religious perspective on these issues.

Arrange the Meeting

Ask for a meeting with the congressperson in his or her local office. Write a letter asking for a meeting to discuss immigration issues with a delegation of faith leaders. One or more prominent religious leaders should sign the letter. Call the scheduler of the congressperson one week after sending the letter, if you don't receive a reply. Be persistent.

Hold a Pre-meeting

Arrange a time to meet for an hour and a half or so before the scheduled appointment. At the pre-meeting, clarify the purpose of the delegation's visit, select a facilitator, review the

proposed agenda, decide on roles (who will say what), and remind people that unity is important, so issues without consensus should not be raised at the meeting.

A typical meeting might look like this:

Opening

Designate a delegate to open the meeting with prayer. (Be sensitive to interfaith representatives in the room.) Have the facilitator thank the member of Congress (or legislative aide) for his or her time and outline how the group would like the meeting to proceed.

Introductions

Each person should introduce himself or herself. This is not a time to be humble! Give all relevant titles, community connections, and reasons why you could influence other constituents.

Issue Background

Have designated individuals who are confident about the issues make the case on our immigration issues. Be sure to review the materials available on www.iwj.org for talking points.

Support for Our Issues

The rest of the delegates should describe their concerns with the current immigration system and their religious traditions' teachings for the respect of human dignity and the teachings on how to treat strangers among us and those who work for wages.

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Questions to Member of Congress

The meeting facilitator should ask the political leader where she stands on immigration issues. Does she support our agenda? If not, what are the points of difference?

Member of Congress Response

Open the conversation to allow the congressperson or senator to discuss what he thinks can happen at this time and what role he intends to play. Sometimes the elected leader has questions. Answer them if you can. If not, promise to get back to him with answers. Often the official says he wants to study the issue and campaign. Ask when you can follow up to find

out what his decision is. Sometimes the leader agrees. Thank him and ask what other ideas he has for reaching other legislators.

Closing

Thank the elected leader for the meeting. Confirm the next steps (such as that you will get back with information to answer a particular question). Close with prayer.

Evaluate the Meeting

Send a brief evaluation, including commitments made by the member of Congress and by your group, to the Rev. Michael Livingston: mlivingston@iwj.org