

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 5/29/2023

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

ONE AT ONE – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, May 30 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for those who are without safe housing. Pray for their protection and economic support. Ask that we might be instruments through which people can find the kind of housing that gives them security and allows them to live affordably in their community.*

Immigration has been a pressing topic and will continue to be so well into the future. Politicians have used immigration as a campaign topic, often make false claims about immigrants (they come to steal your jobs, illegal immigrants vote in elections, immigrants bring drugs and crime, etc.) in order to create fear about those who seek sanctuary and citizenship in our country. How do you feel about immigrants? Consider these situations:

Would you consider helping our church support housing and resettlement of a refugee family from the Ukraine whose home has been destroyed by the war with Russia?

Would you consider helping house and care for refugees from Sudan because of the fighting led by two rival generals?

How about immigrants from Armenia fleeing the conflict with Azerbaijan?

What about refugees from Guatemala trying to escape the poverty, crime, violence, and food insecurity in their country?

What were your thoughts about assisting these immigrants to our country? Were your feelings different based on the region of the world from which they come? If it was, that might tell you something about your personal biases.

It may be helpful to identify the different categories used today for those who come here:

- Displaced persons are those who have been forced to leave their homes due to conflict or natural disaster.
- Refugees are those who have had to leave their nation due to violence, conflict, or war. These people want to return to their homeland when it is safe, though it may be years before that can happen.
- Migrants are those who have chosen to leave their home country to escape poverty.
- Immigrants are similar to migrants. Immigrants move to another country for many reasons such as marriage or other family ties, employment or business opportunities, and so on. There are immigrants who come with legal papers and some who come without legal permission.
- Asylum seekers are those who have requested immigration to our country because of religious or political persecution, or because of other violations of their human rights.

For Christians, issues of immigration become even more challenging when we look at what scripture says. There are more than twenty Bible passages that speak to the question of how we should respond to those from other parts of the world who come here in need. These words from scripture may push us to reevaluate our personal beliefs about our response to immigrants, both socially and politically.

In both Leviticus and Deuteronomy, GOD is very specific in instructing us about our response to those who immigrate to our country. Leviticus 19:34 says, “The foreigner residing among you must be treated as you native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your GOD.” Several times in scripture, we are reminded to recall that our family lines at one time or another were immigrants from a foreign land to this country (unless you are native American). We are encouraged treat foreigners as we would want to be treated were we in their circumstances.

I Chronicles 16:19-22 speaks of GOD’S protection for GOD’S people when they were immigrating, trying to find a home: “When they were few in number, of little account, and strangers in the land, wandering from nation to nation, from one kingdom to another people, HE allowed no one to oppress them; HE rebuked kings on their account, saying, ‘Do not touch MY anointed ones; do MY prophets no harm.’” More than GOD’S protection, we are called to share in that divine providence by helping those are in need. In Leviticus 23:22, GOD says, “When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them for the poor and for the foreigner residing among you. I am the LORD your GOD.” Providing for the poor and the foreigner are hallmarks of GOD’S expectations for our response to those who are in want.

The New Testament also advocates for the caring of those who are in want, including those who are foreigners. JESUS often talked about caring for those who are need or even who might be perceived as an enemy. Hospitality is a priority throughout the Bible and, again, caring for others as we would wish to be treated is paramount in the scripture. I like how Hebrews 13:1-2 reminds us about our care for others: Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing, some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.

In CHRIST'S love,
Pastor Jeffrey