Week 2

Leaders Guide
Week 2

Outline of Class

- Welcome
- Opening Prayer
- Teaching
- Activity
- Closing prayer

Welcome [Display Slide 1 & 2 in the accompanying Powerpoint]

Class leaders welcome students to the class, invite them to sit and make themselves comfortable. If waiting for more students to arrive, engage in small talk before offering the opening prayer.

Teaching – Class Leaders’ Script

[Slide 3] In today's class, we are going to explore perceptions of refugees – popular perceptions, misconceptions, our own views, and the stories of former refugees themselves. The challenge – to each of us – is to try to see refugees, or anyone we may perceive as ‘other,’ as beloved children of God. As St. Paul says in the Letter to the Romans, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." (Romans 12:2) (What ideas do we have in our minds that conform to patterns of this world? How do we transform and renew our minds? These are the questions we'll explore today.)

[Slide 4] When you hear the word refugee, what comes to mind?

Invite participants to say out loud what comes to their minds

Popular perceptions are often shaped by the media and politicians.

[Slide 5] Here are the image results from a simple Google search of the word "refugee."

What do these images depict?

Invite participants to answer. Allow some silence, but if participants do not respond aloud, offer words like “devastation, sadness, loss, grief, fear, survival...”

Refugees flee unimaginable horror, persecution, and violence to seek safety in another country.
Formerly, in the popular imagination, the word 'refugee' and images of refugees might have conjured feelings of sympathy, sadness, a desire to help. Since the formal beginning of the US Refugee Program in 1980, tens of thousands of churches and countless individuals have been inspired to welcome newcomers – to volunteer, to cosponsor a family, to support resettlement.

Recently, we've seen troubling developments with popular perceptions of refugees. In the past three years particularly, various political leaders have increasingly used fear-based messaging to conflate refugees with the very terror and violence they flee.

These messages and images spread misinformation, generate unwarranted fear, and create an “us vs them” mentality.

Many of us fall prey to the manipulation of these negative messages about refugees. Fear is leads us to create and believe in stories that perpetuate our fear.

Yet, we are told again and again throughout scripture, "Do not fear, for I am with you…” (Isaiah 41:10)

Removing fear from our own hearts, and saving our friends, neighbors, and family of its grasp, is neither easy nor quick. It takes patience, commitment, care, and relationship.

It takes holy listening – listening to understand, listening with compassion.

The global picture of the refugee crisis is enormous and complex, which makes it an easy target for fear-based messaging, and manipulation of popular opinion. But changing our own negative perceptions, or offering neighbors, loved ones, and friends a new image about refugees as beloved children of God starts simply. It starts with encounter. It starts with story.

This video comes from Episcopal Migration Ministries' local resettlement partner in Denver, Colorado, Lutheran Family Services of the Rocky Mountains – and depicts stories of new Americans who could easily be your neighbor, your student, your security guard. The video is a snapshot of the reality of refugee resettlement in the United States: stories of hope, new beginnings, family, love,
and bright futures.

[Slide 11] In our baptismal covenant, we are asked two questions that are directly connected to our conversation today:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Celebrant:</th>
<th>Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People:</td>
<td>I will, with God’s help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrant:</td>
<td>Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People:</td>
<td>I will, with God’s help.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Living into these two promises is lifelong work and can take on different shapes and forms: prayer, service, prophetic witness. Importantly, these promises also ask that we engage in self-reflection as we deepen our relationship with Christ, and that we invite others to see themselves and others as God sees them.

[Slide 12] We engage with those with whom we disagree, with patience, kindness, care, sharing stories that may give them a different lens through which to view the world. We share Good News.

[Slide 13] In the Gospel of John, Jesus continues calling his disciples. After he calls Philip, Philip goes to Nathanael and tells him "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph of Nazareth."

Nathanael, memorably, asks, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

Nazareth was a small village at the time of Jesus, thought too insignificant to be the place from whence the Messiah would come. Too backwater. Too backward. Nazoreans had different accents, different ways, different beliefs, were just... different.

[Slide 14] Philip bids Nathanael, "Come and see."

Come and see. That can be the biggest hurdle – to come and see and know those who are different from us. Whom we may not easily understand, who may not easily understand us.

Come and see a different image of displaced people - beloved children made in
God’s image, with God-given gifts to share and important stories we need to hear.

[Slide 15] Come and see. Then – go and tell.

Changing perceptions and prejudices, especially when they are formed by fear and falsehoods, requires patience, gentleness, and good news. It requires storytelling, relationship, and encounter that short circuit the negative views and impressions and offer a new way of seeing – perhaps even seeing the way God sees.

Jesus and his disciples intuitively understood the power of messaging, of teaching through parable, of sharing the Good News through story. This is our heritage, and with practice, this is a gift we can share – stories that bring joy where there is sadness, understanding where there is confusion, hope where there is fear.

Nathanael’s misperception of Jesus was immediately changed through direct encounter – through relationship. Through an experience that short circuited his prejudice. One could say that he came face to face with the good news of God in Jesus, literally, and this changed his world.

Go and tell the Good News.

How do we tell the Good News? How do we let light shine in darkness, let hope overcome fear?

Through story.

[Slide 16] What ideas do we have in our minds that conform to the patterns of this world? How do we transform and renew our minds?

[Slide 17] Closing Prayer

Prayer for Migrants & Refugees

[Source: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops]

Lord Jesus, when you multiplied the loaves and fishes, you provided more than food for the body, you offered us the gift of yourself, the gift which satisfies every hunger and quenches every thirst! Your disciples were filled with fear and doubt, but you poured out your love and compassion on the migrant crowd, welcoming them as brothers and sisters.

Lord Jesus, today you call us to welcome the members of God’s family who come to our land to escape oppression, poverty, persecution, violence, and war. Like your disciples, we too are filled with fear and doubt and even suspicion. We build barriers in our hearts and in our minds.