



## **A THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION FOR ONE PEOPLE**

### **MULTI-CONGREGATIONAL RESOURCE SERIES**

The story of God is the story of an immigrant people. God was hospitable to His people Israel. We act likewise in welcoming the refugee, the stranger, and the sojourner. We seek to be immigrant receptive churches.

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## MULTI-CONGREGATIONAL RESOURCE SERIES

### THE STORY OF GOD IS THE STORY OF AN IMMIGRANT PEOPLE

- God's story begins in the act of creation when He took upon Himself the form of an immigrant. He moved from the heavens into the arena of human experience and geography (Acts 17 v 226-27). His was a voluntary migration.
- Through disobedience Adam and Eve were forced to migrate from the intimacy of the Garden and travel in "foreign" land.
- The promise to Abram of a homeland is best viewed against the backdrop of a vacation garden - the original home of humankind.
- Abram left the familiarity of Ur of the Chaldees to receive the promise and became a stranger in foreign lands.
- The people of Israel - whether sojourning, in captivity, or in the wilderness - were an "alien" people in need of provision and protection.
- The stories of Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Esther, Ruth, Daniel, Ezra and Nehemiah are a sampling of God's immigrant people. Each traveled from on location to another always in need of sustenance.
- Jesus is history's ultimate illustration of God's migrant people.
- He came from the Father, from heaven to earth, and lived as a stranger among all the peoples. In the words of Eugene Peterson: "The Word became flesh and blood and moved into

**JOHN  
MOORE**  
**SENIOR PASTOR**  
**CONCORD, CA**  
**CHURCH OF THE**  
**NAZARENE**

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a Theology of  
Stranger-Embracing  
and Being an  
Immigrant People.*

the neighborhood." (John 1 v 14). He was in His very nature unlike those He lived among (Phil 2 v 5 , Col 1 v 15).

- While on earth He experienced the hardships associated with being displaced. (Luke 10 v 38, John 1 v 10-11).
- Certainly Jesus was speaking with a sense of personal identification when He forecast the end time judgment in the language and experience of an immigrant....."For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in. I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me. I was in prison and you came to visit me." (Matthew 25 v 35-36).
- The Early Church was summoned to tangible ministries of reconciliation in Christ.
- The first Christians continued the tradition of showing hospitality to strangers. (Romans 16 v 1-2, 23; John 1 v 5-8).
- Hospitality to strangers was one of the characteristics required of Early Church leaders (I Timothy 3 v 1-2).
- By extension, all of God's people are immigrants on earth (John 15 v 18-19; I Peter 1 v 1). We have sung the words, "This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through", "We're marching to Zion", and "In the New Jerusalem" to name just a few.

## **GOD WAS HOSPITABLE TO HIS PEOPLE ISRAEL**

- As migrant people, Israel was often in need of food, shelter, protection, and clothing. God provided for all their needs. (Exodus 16-17; Deuteronomy 8 v 2-5; Psalm 104 v 10-15).
- God instructed Israel to remember their own experience as strangers as a way toward identifying with foreigners among them. (Exodus 23 v 9, Leviticus 19 v 33-34, 23 v 22).
- The hospitality God offered Israel served as the model for Israel's hospitality to the stranger. Blessing, effectiveness and salvation were attached to this command.

*"No, the kind of fasting I want calls you to free those who are wrongly imprisoned and to stop oppressing those who work for you. Treat them fairly and give them what they earn."  
I want you to share your food with the hungry and to welcome poor wanderers into your homes. Give clothes to those who need them, and do not hide from relatives who need your help. If you do these things, your salvation will come like the dawn. Yes your healing will come quickly. Your godliness will lead you forward, and the glory of the Lord will protect you from behind. Then when you call, the Lord will answer.....yes, I am here, He will quickly reply....stop oppressing the helpless and stop making false accusations and spreading vicious rumors. Feed the hungry and help those in trouble. Then your light will shine out from the darkness, and the darkness around you will be as bright as day." (Isaiah 58 v 10).*

- God's story is the story of immigrant people and His call to show hospitality toward the "alien", "foreigner" or "stranger".

## IMMIGRANT RECEPTIVE CHURCHES

- God's hospitable nature informs our understanding of what it means to be His people - we are those who welcome the refugee, the stranger and the sojourner.
- When we are hospitable to strangers we are providing more than social services - we are practicing an embodied theology - Christ in us.
- The plight of displaced people is often disheartening, creating the opportunity for God's people to provide for their needs. Hospitality towards the stranger means addressing their needs in concrete ways, i.e., advocacy, protection, immigration assistance, technical assistance etc.
- Hospitality is by nature best viewed when firmly grounded in Biblical ethics. This is the way God's people respond to immigrants.
- Established congregations must cease retreating and learn to embrace emerging immigrant communities.
- Immigrant needs require the local church to retool and restructure around ministries of compassion.
- Immigrant-receptive churches naturally team up with collaborative community groups seeking to address the same needs.
- Immigrant-receptive congregations provide space for immigrant peoples.
- Evangelism strategies shift from conversion -focused to conversation - focused strategies. Immigrants discover the God of hospitality and compassion incarnated in His people. Evangelism remains a top priority.
- Immigrant-receptive pastors have a unique understanding of what ministry really is. Listening, learning, resourcing, affirming, resolving conflict, and problem solving are understood to be redemptive activities.
- Immigrant- receptive pastors reallocate their ministry time and energy. These pastors spend their time on leaders and interests of groups other than the original membership. These pastors tend to see the community as their parish. Lay leaders agree and bless.
- Immigrant-receptive pastors embrace a variety of worship, leadership and relational styles among various groups.

My wife met Svetlana in the hallway of the school where she stood bewildered and lost among the throngs of middle school students. Vicki asked if she could help with anything. Lana, as we have come to know her, shared that she and her family had been in the United States just four days, having emigrated from Russia. She and her son were in total confusion, understanding very little English, unfamiliar with the systems, cold from the weather (some well-meaning friend had told them not to take coats to California because it never gets cold there) and not a friend in their new world. Not many weeks later the Podkolzina family, Alexander, Svetlana, Gleb and Sasha were in our home for dinner and attending worship for the first time in their lives. The new church family helped them with clothing, furniture, a computer for email "home", insurance and the purchase of an automobile. During their second Christmas in the U.S. they knelt for family communion with Lana's mother who was visiting from Moscow. She was an atheist who had never been in a Christian church.

As Communion was served she began to cry. Her granddaughter asked her, "Why are you crying? You don't even believe in God!" She replied in Russian, "Yes, but I feel God here."