

7 Ways to Bless Immigrants Instead of Bashing Them

This morning when I bought a newspaper in the Orlando airport, the man who rang up my purchase greeted me with a bashful smile. The name on his employee badge was "ZIAD." I always try to guess where people are from, but his name wasn't familiar. Was he from Lebanon? Jordan? Egypt?

Ziad finally solved the mystery. "I am Palestinian, sir," he said.

"Welcome, Ziad," I told him, "Let me be the first person to tell you today that I'm glad you are here in the United States!"

"That makes me very happy, sir," he replied.

I've been going out of my way to say kind words to immigrants these days—not just because Donald Trump has been offending them with his "all Mexicans are rapists" comments but also because I believe Christians have a responsibility to be hospitable to foreigners.

I understand the fear that has gripped our country in this age of ISIS terror. In the last month around 130 people died in the Paris attacks, 43 were killed in Beirut and 224 died in the Russian airliner that was allegedly bombed by radical jihadis. In response to the violence, 30 U.S. governors have announced that Syrian refugees aren't welcome here—even though they are fleeing to America to escape terrorists.

What I don't understand is how Christians in this country can be so heartless when it comes to showing kindness to the very people Jesus told us to love. We have allowed our fear—as well as our cherished Republican Party values—to nullify God's Word. (Note to critics: I'm a Republican, but I'm a Christian

first.)

The New Testament calls us to love not only the people who look like us but even those who are considered enemies. Hebrews 13:2 says: “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unknowingly.” Meanwhile Christian leaders are exhorted in 1 Timothy 3:2 to be “hospitable”—and this is not simply a reference to hosting a meal. The word is in the Greek *philoxenos*, which means “love of strangers.”

So how can you and your church obey this biblical mandate and show love to the strangers who live near you? Here are a few suggestions, offered just in time for the holiday season:

1. Say something nice. I often tell immigrants I’m glad they are in the United States—and most of them say they’ve never received a compliment like that before. Many of them are lonely—and they feel unwelcome, especially when Mr. Trump and other disrespectful Americans complain about foreigners as if they carry a disease.

2. Find out their story. You might be surprised to learn that the “Muslim” living in your neighborhood is actually a Middle Eastern Christian. Or that the Somali refugee who attends your child’s high school fled to this country to escape a war. All you have to say is: “I’d love to hear how you came to live in America.” Then listen.

3. Invite them to church. Never assume that immigrants are hostile to your faith. When I spoke recently in South Dakota, I met a Muslim girl from Uzbekistan who has been attending church for months out of curiosity. She finds love and friendship among Christians, even though she struggles to understand why Jesus died for her.

4. Offer legal help. Americans often complain about illegal immigrants without bothering to realize that many of them are eager to comply with our laws. They actually need help

navigating our complicated system, which is snarled by delays and unfair to people from certain countries. Recruit lawyers in your church to provide free seminars or other legal assistance to immigrants in your area.

5. Prepare a Christmas meal. Foreigners who move to the United States are curious about the meaning of our Christmas holiday—and they won't understand it by visiting a local mall or by watching *Elf*. Invite international students or an immigrant family into your home and let them experience your family traditions.

6. "Adopt" a refugee family. Aside from the displaced Syrians who are waiting to come to the U.S. today, refugees from Africa and other nations are probably already living near you. Most of them have been traumatized by war, poverty or persecution—and they are lonely and insecure. Contact one of the Christian organizations working with refugees (such as World Relief) and volunteer to provide meals, babysitting, Christmas gifts or mentoring.

7. Become an English instructor. There are more than 1 million internationals studying on U.S. campuses in 2015. (The majority come from China, India, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Canada, Japan, Taiwan, Vietnam, Mexico and Brazil.) These students would love an American friend to help them with their English. Offer to be a language coach by contacting your local college or university.

While the immigrant-bashers talk of building a wall to keep immigrants out, we are called to build bridges of friendship. Let's remember that Jesus—who lived as a refugee in Egypt during His infancy—wants the church to love foreigners. {eo}