

What Donald Trump Doesn't Get About Immigrants

This week I preached at a pastors' conference in Brookings, South Dakota. Before I arrived I assumed the sponsoring church, Holy Life Tabernacle, would be a mostly white congregation, since South Dakota is 82 percent white. But, when I walked into the Sunday service, I was greeted by Ghanaians, Rwandans, Nigerians and Congolese, most of them students or professionals who had recently moved to this small community north of Sioux Falls.

There were so many internationals in the service that I decided to ask everyone who had been born in another country to stand. There were more than 75 foreigners attending the church that day—about one-third of the congregation. Even pastor David Kaufman and his wife, Jeanne, who have been sharing Christ on the local university campus for years, were surprised to see how many foreigners have made Holy Life their home church.

That Sunday I made sure these internationals felt appreciated. "I want to say to each of you: Welcome to the United States!" I told them. "We are glad you are here!" They all smiled and clapped—and the Ghanaians cheered when I noted that they had the largest group.

I will be honest: The reason I so eagerly welcomed these immigrants is that I'm absolutely ashamed of the way many Americans act toward our foreign friends. And the current presidential campaign is not helping.

Case in point: Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump—who seems to thrive on being intentionally offensive—insulted all Mexicans this past summer when he claimed that immigrants entering the United States from Mexico

are a bad influence on our country. He said: "They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists."

To make his jabs even more hurtful, Trump told audiences that if he becomes president he will deport the entire undocumented population and end the practice of giving citizenship to children born to foreigners on U.S. soil. Trump said in July: "I will build a great wall on our southern border, and I will make Mexico pay for that wall."

I've been a Republican since I began voting at age 18. But Trump's anti-immigrant rhetoric is enough to make me forfeit my association with the GOP. It's a shame that a candidate who claims to care about the future of the United States would be so hateful toward people who came to this country looking for the American dream. It's even worse that Trump's attitude is shared by some Christians who should know better.

There are three things we should remember about immigrants:

1. Immigrants are a blessing to our nation. Trump either slept through history class or he has a very short memory. America was shaped by immigrants—those who came from Ireland, Italy, Poland and Norway in the 1800s; the Hmong and Vietnamese refugees of the 1970s; and the Latinos, Africans and Indians coming here today. Immigrants start small businesses and stimulate the economy. Contrary to what Mr. Trump believes, immigrants do not breed crime; studies show that they are actually less likely to be jailed for a crime than citizens.

2. The church is called to welcome and care for foreigners. The Bible commands us: "The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself" (Lev. 19:34a). Our immigration policies should be tempered by kindness and a desire to share our blessings, not hoard them from the poor or less fortunate. In August a Donald Trump supporter told Hispanic reporter Jorge Ramos—who is a U.S. citizen—to "get out of my country." He

might as well have waved a swastika flag. The incident indicated that some of Trump's fans are promoting a sick, racist nationalism that could fuel anti-immigrant violence. Christians should be modeling the opposite.

3. God has a prophetic purpose for immigrants. Mr. Trump believes he can just build a wall to keep Mexicans out of our country. But what if God wants to bring Mexicans to the United States for His purpose? What if He wants to create a haven of protection in our country for refugees from Syria? The apostle Paul preached that it is the sovereign God who created the nations and "appointed fixed times and the boundaries of their habitation" (Acts 17:26). We could actually find ourselves fighting God if we resist showing kindness to the immigrants God wants us to protect.

Many Americans today fear that immigrants are coming here to spread crime or terrorism. Of course we have to be vigilant to prevent Islamic extremists or violent gangs from entering this country. And of course we can't just let anyone set up camp within our borders without enforcing the law. But let's not forget that some of the worst terrorism on U.S. soil was carried out by crazed U.S. citizens, including white supremacist Dylann Roof who shot nine African-American Christians in a South Carolina church last June. Our biggest threat of violence is not from outsiders.

The Christian community should be standing in solidarity with the huddled masses of immigrants who come to our country seeking a better life. Shame on Donald Trump and any other political candidate who wants to slam the door on foreigners.