

Minnesota Conference Immigration Team Annual Report -May 2016

The Minnesota Conference Immigration Team, better known as the I Team, sees as its ministry the promotion of justice for the immigrants in our midst. We take seriously the Biblical mandate to welcome the immigrant. (Leviticus 19:33-34 “When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.” NRSV)

Due to a lack of in-depth reporting in the media about the plight of immigrants and the root causes for their migration to the US, the I Team sees its ministry to be one of education and promotion of actions that will improve the lives of our immigrant brothers and sisters. Thank you to the congregations that invited us into your churches this year to carry out this mission.

- The I Team provided educational sessions at the following churches around the issue of immigrants in detention who are in for-profit prisons. This was especially relevant since the Minnesota Legislature is making decisions about how to deal with the more than 500 prisoners who are housed in jails rather than prisons due to overcrowding. It has been our ministry to encourage the Legislature to change their sentencing guidelines as well as to NOT open a Corrections Corporations of America (CCA) in Appleton, MN. Thanks to the following churches willing to learn about this.
 1. St. Anthony Park
 2. Mayflower UCC
 3. Robbinsdale UCC
 4. Union St. Louis Park
- The I Team conducted worship services around the topic of immigration at the following congregations:
 1. St. Anthony Park (fall 2015)
 2. Grace, Millville (February 28, 2016)
- The I Team, especially under the leadership of Rev. John Guttermann, assisted in the planning of the Lenten series on Refugees for First Lutheran Church, Alexandria

The I Team has also been active this year in the promotion of our UCC churches Becoming Immigrant Welcoming Congregations. To that end we have revised the document, “Becoming an Immigrant Welcoming Congregation: The Journey is Made by Walking” to make it a Minnesota user friendly document. The I Team has developed a resolution to come before the Conference at the 2016 Annual Meeting which encourages the Minnesota Conference of the UCC to become an Immigrant Welcoming Conference and for the churches of the conference to become Immigrant Welcoming Congregations. The above document will assist congregations in taking that step.

Two of our Conference congregations have discerned what their call is with immigrants:

1. Robbinsdale, after prayer and discernment, has declared itself to be a Sanctuary Church. They will house an immigrant when they are called to do so. Ask them about their call to this ministry!

2. Mayflower UCC has declared itself to be a Sanctuary Supporting Congregation and will support Robbinsdale in their ministry. They vote on May 18 to become an Immigrant Welcoming Congregation.

A National UCC Collaborative on Immigration was formed this year when 15 UCC members active in immigration reform throughout the UCC, including the chair of the MN I Team, went to the border in Tucson and Nogales and developed a plan as to how to centralize the work that each was doing. This collaborative designated the Minnesota Conference as one of the first two Conferences to encourage its members to vote to become Immigrant Welcoming Conferences. Our Conference I Team is being asked to assist other Conferences in following our lead in this.

We rejoice in the ministry that we have been given to do and look forward to working with our churches as together we seek to extend an extravagant welcome to our immigrant brothers and sisters.

Current members of the I Team are: Nathan Syverson, Rev. Joanne Sylvander, Rev. John Guttermann, Bruce Richardson, Susie George, Doug Spike, Craig Thorsen, Rev. Michael Wasylik, and Diane Haines, chair.