

AN ANGLO-AMERICAN CHURCH FACING CHANGE:
STRATEGIES TO GUIDE TRANSITIONS IN MINISTRY WITH IMMIGRANTS

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ABSTRACT

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Immigration at the beginning of the 21st century impacts existing towns and neighborhoods, displacing old identities and bringing new faces to the old neighborhoods. This Doctor of Ministry project is a critical inquiry into mission and ministry with respect to the issue of immigration at Centenary United Methodist Church, a predominantly Anglo-centered congregation in the local townships of Metuchen and Edison, New Jersey. Through interviews with local religious leaders I developed practical strategies and faith practices to begin to equip the congregation to better understand kinship in the kingdom of God with respect to immigrants and refugees. A critical aspect of the study is to help church members uncover what the Bible says about the issue of immigration, to see mission and ministry differently, and to recognize prejudice and discover their own “foreignness.” The goal is to help church members move from fear and self-centered practices toward a new paradigm of hospitality, welcoming the stranger as other, becoming a compassionate and unifying harmonious community of belonging. Centenary is a work in progress and we as the body of Christ are called to discover new opportunities in this time of change.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The context of church and community is changing at a frenetic pace in a globalized world. The nature of mission and how we do ministry needs to reflect these changes. The 21st century has seen continued increase in mass migration of people, increasing the diversity and impacting communities of Northern New Jersey. As Toni Morrison suggests,

The spectacle of mass movement due to globalization draws attention to the borders, the porous places, the vulnerable points where the concept of home is seen as being menaced by foreigners. This has created an uneasiness in people unaware of their own foreignness' and rapidly disintegrating sense of belonging. Resulting in ongoing problems of racism and race relations, the so-called clashes of culture in our search to belong.¹

There is a long-standing belief that immigrants take away jobs from Americans, thus derailing the American economy. Many American workers, struggling to recover from the recession, have said they feel squeezed out by immigrants.² Immigration is changing

¹ Toni Morrison, *The Origin of Other* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 94.

² Julia Preston, "Immigrants Aren't Taking Americans' Jobs, New Study Finds," *The New York Times*, September 21, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/22/us/immigrants-arent-taking-americans-jobs-new-study-finds.html>.

neighborhoods and communities, giving rise to tensions that stem from fear of the stranger.

I serve a local church in Metuchen, New Jersey, a multiracial, multiethnic congregation that continues to struggle — like many other local churches that are predominantly Anglo-centered in the neighborhood — to embrace the immigrant population and recognize their needs. Immigrant communities are remodeling and reshaping the religious landscape of America. In Metuchen and Edison, the Asian minority population is growing tremendously. According to a *New York Times* report, Indians comprise between 20 to 25 percent of the population and have significantly shifted the culture from what was once a blue-collar and middle-class white community.³ As part of their commitment to diversity, churches welcome minorities, but new members may want something more than just to be welcomed and assimilated. Furthermore, their presence will change how churches operate, perhaps shifting the power balances within the church, perhaps decreasing practices related to Euro-centric Christianity.

I. Purpose of the Project and Relevant Context

The purpose of this project is to analyze the root of prejudice and fears and to create opportunities for relieving tension in order to bring healing and harmony.

Centenary is living on the edge of what was once an established church identity with a

³ Joseph Berger, “A Place Where Indians, Now New Jerseyans, Thrive,” *The New York Times*, April 27, 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/27/nyregion/nyregionspecial2/27indianj.html>.

dated understanding of mission rather than facing the post-Christendom mission of the future.

Migration is a complex, multi-dimensional issue, with many causes and impacts. The host countries that people migrate from continue to have unstable political governments, economic uncertainty, corruption, and poverty. Climate change is creating natural disasters, and people feel vulnerable and threatened. They are desperately seeking better lives for themselves and families. In all of this I wanted to find out the Christian ethical response of church leadership and communities of faith local to my own faith community amidst this challenging and emerging context of ministry.

Immigrants are not just isolated individuals living in a cocoon. In the process of emigrating to the United States, they bring with them their values, culture, language, and traditions. An immigrant coming to the United States is expected to learn to assimilate, adopting American culture as their own and turning into Americanized immigrants. American immigration has traditionally been referred to as a melting pot of cultures and traditions. According to this understanding, the fusion of various cultures, religious sects, and ethnic groups forms one distinct people that has lost any vestiges of original culture. But in practice, many immigrants hold on to their language and ethnic cultural traditions. This kind of racial integration is called a salad bowl. Migration in large numbers creates ethnic ghettos or enclaves. We have had Italians, Irish, Polish, Russians, Chinese, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and now Indian, Pakistani, Ghanaians, and others. People who speak the same language and follow similar traditions tend to live in the same ethnic ghetto.

Many new immigrants from the global south meet fierce racial and ethnic discrimination. Within my geographical context, ethnic ghettoization and assimilation of Indians are more serious now than a hundred years ago. A *Time* magazine article by Joel Stein describes the experience of many white Americans who feel like a minority in this newly formed Indian town called Edison. The title of this piece is, “My Own Private India — how a Jersey Town Named After Thomas Edison Became Home to All-American Guindians.”

My town is totally unfamiliar to me. The Pizza Hut where my busboy friends stole pies for our drunken parties is now an Indian sweets shop with a completely inappropriate roof. The A&P I shoplifted from is now an Indian grocery.... Eventually, there were enough Indians in Edison to change the culture. At which point my townsfolk started calling the new Edisonians "dot heads." One kid I knew in high school drove down an Indian-dense street yelling for its residents to “go home to India.”⁴

Hinduism is the religion for the majority of Indians that migrate to the United States. In the Hindu culture women wear a dot on their forehead as sign of blessing from God and married life, hence “Dot Heads” as a derogatory term for Indian Edisonians. Indian grocery shops selling exotic spices and curry powders are popping up all over Edison. The regular movie theaters in town like Regal Cinemas and AMC Lowes are now showing Asian Indian movies, and people are flocking to them. Most white people who have lived in this neighborhood for many years are anxious and frustrated and feeling out of place in their own hometowns. Asian Indian residents make up a sizeable portion of

⁴ Joel Stein, "My Own Private India," *Time Magazine*, (July 5 2010), accessed March 14, 2019, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1999416,00.html>.

Edison township residence. This area is said to have one of the highest percentages of Indo-Americans in the United States. The Edison township recently gave students holiday to observe the Hindu festival of Diwali, the “festival of lights,” in November. Many longtime residents of Edison are completely unfamiliar with the festival.

This immigrant invasion feels threatening and unsettling for the white residents of Edison township. Xenophobia and the feeling of being invaded by foreigners was expressed in 2017 in relation to the Edison school board election candidates. A *Washington Post* article noted that candidates for office in 2017 suffered hateful messages such as, “Deport,” and “Make Edison Great Again”⁵ (though, it must be noted, these ethnic minorities still won.)

The national conversation about immigration also comprises relevant context for this project. Immigration has become one of the defining political questions of Donald Trump’s presidency. The Trump administration has reinforced the efforts of Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) with a zero-tolerance policy toward illegal immigration. Undocumented immigrants picked up on the southern border and separated from their families have been put into immigration detention centers. Some politicians have called this state sponsored terrorism in keeping families apart:

Those who upheld these practices say, “The spectacle of children being arrested sends a stronger message than any amount of police violence against adults could

⁵ Kristine Phillips, "These New Jersey Candidates Were Attacked with Xenophobic Messages.They All Won," *The Washington Post*, November 8, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2017/11/08/these-new-jersey-candidates-were-attacked-with-xenophobic-messages-they-all-won/?utm_term=.9e431018aa8d.

do. The threat that children might be removed from their families is likely to compel parents to keep their kids at home next time — and to stay home themselves.”⁶

Trump, by not condemning bigotry, seems to support white supremacy, causing fear by saying that there is danger of an immigrant invasion. His rhetoric includes statements that immigrants are taking jobs and opportunities, increasing crime in America, and making America poor. Ann Coulter, conservative writer and author of *In Trump We Trust*, writes, “... maybe we should consider admitting immigrants who can succeed in America, rather than deadbeats.”⁷ By this she means admitting educated immigrants such as doctors and lawyers and not dishwashers and landscapers.

Amidst rhetoric that is so degrading and dismissive against immigrants, how do religious leaders enact God’s call to treat the stranger in our midst with dignity and love? There is a protocol that we as American citizens need to follow to stay within the confines of US immigration laws. But what is the responsibility of the church to those who are marginalized and oppressed? Is there a safe place we can create within the community of faith? Can church be a sanctuary for honest discourse and courageous action? My intention in this research is to find out how congregations can better prepare

⁶ Masha Gessen, “Taking Children from Their Parents Is a Form of State Terror,” *The New Yorker*, May 9, 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/taking-children-from-their-parents-is-a-form-of-state-terror>.

themselves and what leadership attributes are necessary to develop an understanding and response to the immigrant situation.

A post-Christendom mission seeks to understand the current and always changing context in the local community where congregants live and serve. One important issue facing immigrant communities is legal status. According to Rob Rutland Brown, the United States contains more than 40 million immigrants. Brown writes, “Without status, immigrants are often vulnerable, with a greater likelihood of danger to their physical, emotional, and spiritual health.”⁸

II. Theological Framework

In the Lord’s prayer, Christians call upon God to establish the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus Christ came to bring this kingdom to the people of God. The church, or the body of Christ, is governed by the principles of the kingdom of God and is to reflect these qualities as much as possible in everything it is and does. The church is the vehicle through which God’s people learn, grow and practice love. The ethics of the kingdom of God demands a culture of love, justice, and equality for all God’s people irrespective of race, color, and gender.

⁸ Rob Rutland-Brown, "Building a Vibrant National Immigrant Justice Ministry," *United Methodist Committee on Relief*, August 2017, <https://www.umcor.org/umcor/resources/news-stories/2017/august/0830buildingavibrantnationalimmigrantjusticeministry>.

Most congregations in thriving towns like Edison and Metuchen are caught in the midst of tremendous change and transformation due to the gradual influx of immigrant populations. My project is a critical inquiry into this question of what it means to be a church of the 21st century amidst this complex matrix of variables like race, language, and cultural identity. The questions that emerge require a deep discovery into the meaning of “kinship” in the Kingdom of God. It is a discovery into the origin of an “other” in the context of a monochromatic monoculture that is corrosive and disruptive to the idea of community. My hope and task are to uncover the hidden potential in this seemingly difficult situation, so we can live out God’s calling in this new and everchanging world of ours.

III. Scope of the Project

The scope of this project clearly determines the goals and objectives involved in such a study. The scope states what the objectives of the project are and what goals must be met to achieve success. The critical aspect of this project is to help the participants from the local church to uncover what the Bible says about the issue of immigration and to understand the importance of seeing mission and ministry in a different way. It is very important for them to value the impact of immigration in their lives. The intention is to challenge the participants to understand and be aware of their own prejudices and discover their own foreignness. The goal is to help the participants move from fear and self-centered practices toward strangers to a more compassionate and unifying harmonious community. My desire is to help participants understand our human and

global connection with respect to the immigrant community rather than having individualistic and narcissistic goals in moving forward. I will show video presentations and read other literature to guide their thought processes towards a compassionate and generous stance in their understanding of the issue of immigration. Some of the participants will be immigrants who can then share their struggles with the larger group. This will help the group to develop empathy towards the immigrants and create understanding around the difficulty and hard work encountered in the process of migration. I would like the participants in the bible study to find practical ways in which church can be a place of refuge, love and compassion for the immigrant community. I would like the faith community to value and affirm new immigrants in their community. Finally, I would encourage the bible study participants to see the co-operative search for the strengths, passions and life-giving forces that exist within immigrant communities and which hold potential for inspired, positive change. The goal of the study is to develop mission and ministry centered around justice for immigrant communities.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

I adopted two methodologies for this project. I began with one-on-one interviews with religious leaders working within a 5-mile radius of Metuchen and Edison. I then conducted a four-part bible study with 5-7 individuals with varied backgrounds from my local church. The intention behind these research methodologies was to understand the response to immigrant contextual ministry in my immediate neighborhood but also to grasp the underlying issues and intricate details involved with the immigrant situation in the Metuchen and Edison faith communities. These methodologies enabled me to develop strategies and guidelines that assist primarily white congregations like Centenary to embrace the immigrant population in their neighborhoods and shift the focus of their mission and ministry.

The first research methodology I used consisted of ethnographic interviews carried out with selective group of ministers. Ethnographic interviewing is a type of qualitative research that combines immersive observation and directed one-on-one interviews. Ethnography is primarily a scientific description of the customs of individual peoples and cultures within a specific context. The people I interviewed serve as religious leaders in the Metuchen-Edison community. They are either immigrants themselves or doing mission and ministry in the context of immigrant communities.

I prepared a questionnaire to understand my subjects' context and how they see themselves in this context. An article on rigorous missiological research using qualitative methods by Biola University states, "One of the chief advantages of (rigorous) qualitative inquiry is that its methods allow researchers to capture others' perceptions of whatever phenomenon is the object of study. Qualitative researchers understand that perception is reality for the perceiver."⁹ I used qualitative methodology of interviewing to understand the missiological truth for the interview participants in their context and area of mission. This helped me to seek the nuanced and culturally embedded realities. The interview is a guided conversation to help me as the researcher to construct meaning and collect data about immigration in a specific context. Interview participants were given enough time to go over the questionnaire so they were comfortable in answering the questions. They chose where the interview would take place. The interviewee was clearly told about their right to stop the interview if they felt uncomfortable. The interview was structured but there was enough flexibility provided to get a broader picture of the issue of immigration surrounding their situation.

My first interview was with Reverend Chuck Coblentz, senior pastor at New Dover United Methodist for two and a half years, leading a multicultural, multi-ethnic ministry with growing immigrant populations in Edison, New Jersey. New Dover UMC has embraced these immigrants, inviting them to become a part of the faith community.

⁹ Richard L. Starcher, Leanne M. Dubinski, and Jamie N. Sanchez, "Rigorous missiological research using qualitative inquiry," *Sage* 46, no.1 (2018), 52.

My desire was to understand what is happening to the church as they have become inclusive. What has helped them to be generous to the stranger in their midst? How have they discovered and explored the deeper issues of cultural shift and how have these changes been reflected in worship and leadership?

The second interview was with Reverend Amoon Sharon, who emigrated to United States several years ago with his wife and family to be mission outreach pastor of the First Baptist Church of Metuchen, New Jersey. He was hired to work with the growing southeast Asian community in Edison. He is a native of Karachi, Pakistan. My reason for interviewing Rev. Sharon is my own amazement at the intentional missional ingenuity of the leadership of First Baptist, their understanding the need for a paradigm shift and realizing contextual missional opportunity in the community of Metuchen and Edison.

My third interview was with Reverend Justin Karmann, Associate Pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Metuchen, and focused largely on the impact of national tensions and polarizations. Rev. Karmann is on the front lines of the fight against unjust immigration policies that persecute innocent individuals and families. Rev. Karmann says that just as love knows no border, neither does justice. First Presbyterian has organized and advocated to help in immigration reform, stop deportations, and reunite families.

The second methodology, bible study, addressed human bias formation and the biblical understanding of the concept of “other.” It also helped churches to understand the shifting paradigms of missional context in the globalized world we live in. Finally, the study shed light on the concept of the kingdom of God, specifically “kinship” in the

kingdom of God. It emphasized the necessity of embracing kinship in the kingdom of God in order to learn to love the stranger. My approach involved four essential components: valuing, prizing, esteeming, and honoring, through which participants discovered the wealth and hidden potential of diversity in human relationships, working through polarization that blinds us from seeing missional opportunities to connect with people from different cultures in order to build unity in diversity, that is, to see the beauty of God's creation in this rich diversity of color, culture, and race.

Those individuals who participated in the bible studies represent an equal proportion of ethnic minorities and the Anglo population. Before beginning, participants completed a questionnaire to gauge their knowledge and beliefs concerning the Bible, church, and immigration. I documented their responses during the bible study discussion to recognize the thought process behind the responses and to understand the psychological, emotional, and physical reactions to these issues.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH

The Interviews

The interview subjects were invited to share their personal information about who they are, where they come from, and what their contextual role is with respect to immigration. I also wanted them to discern in their situation the promise and challenges they encounter in ministry with the immigrants. How did they understand mission and ministry in their church and community? What was their idea of kingdom of God and how do they understand the kinship in the kingdom of God? In dealing with issues of immigration and being involved in ministry with immigrants, have they seen prejudice and discrimination and where does it come from? Where do they find the biblical understanding and foundation in the Bible to do ministry with immigrants? What is their current ministry action plan for ministry with immigrants? How do they understand the global refugee crisis and immigrants in our community as opportunity to be discovered rather than a threat to our world?

1) Interview with Reverend Chuck Coblentz

My first interview was with Reverend Chuck Coblentz, senior pastor of New Dover United Methodist Church, a multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-ethnic congregation in Edison, NJ. It is a large congregation with a growing Southeast Asian

population, particularly Asian Indian. He has been very successful in uniting the congregation and challenging them to look at mission and ministry in their community. In just couple of years there has been exponential growth in the Asian Indian population in the church. The leadership is white but changing continuously because of the growing Indian population. Rev. Coblentz is white and has been serving New Dover for three years. His predecessor was an Asian Indian pastor who also did an incredible ministry but was not liked by the white leadership of the church. His mastery over the English language and cultural familiarity were questioned. Since Rev. Coblentz has been the pastor he has been very well received by the entire congregation and has led the congregation in a more progressive pathway.

This congregation has a mix of highly conservative Indian and ethnic people, moderately conservative individuals, and few white liberal folks. There is a struggle with white congregants and the new immigrant population. Rev. Coblentz is an outgoing, funny, kind, and compassionate disciple of Jesus Christ. He is a white liberal pastor with a scientific background and heart for loving God and loving people. He is passionate about social justice and believes strongly that the intersection of the social and the spiritual is the context of mission and ministry in the world. He presents the hard truths of social justice to his congregation under the careful but brilliant disguise of humor and laughter. This way he believes it becomes easy to digest and results in greater toleration of the challenge he offers to his congregation.

A week before the interview I handed Rev. Coblentz a packet which outlined the interview questions I was going to ask him. He gave me some preliminary information to

help with background for the interview. Rev. Coblenz is a 60-year-old white male who began his ministry 30 years ago. He is a graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary. He began his Christian journey in a conservative Southern New Jersey community with a lot of racial tension which has since evolved. His first degree is in Paleontology Science. His first encounter with immigrant ministry was when he served a congregation in Asbury Park, New Jersey, with 50 percent of its membership Haitian. There was, he reported, much talk going around town in Asbury Park that was stereotypically racist and xenophobic. Concerns that “the city was attracting these Haitian immigrants who were lazy and bringing diseases into the country.” But he observed that the Haitian people were not actually like this. They were hardworking immigrants who believed in education, and he reported that several of their children became high school valedictorians.

Rev. Coblenz also served as chaplain in Pennington, a Methodist preparatory school for youth with learning differences. There he met youth from Korea, China, and different parts of the world. This gave Rev. Coblenz an experience of international culture and tradition. He feels blessed in this ministry with immigrants.

Looking at the promises and challenges in this ministry he finds he has continued to be endowed with increasing cultural understanding and appreciation of ethnic traditions other than his own. He talked about the differences in understanding of time between non-white ethnic traditions and white traditions. He sees the dividing line between ethnic cultures as ones of both education and class. The Asian Indian population comes from a culture that is heavily embedded in the oppressive caste system.

Overcoming class differences and language barriers is difficult in a multi-cultural congregation. He talked about how he is slowly changing leadership in the church to represent the worshipping community, removing the barriers of division by race, class, and education. The church is surrounded by a growing South Asian community. He spoke of how the annual Christmas pageant in the church reflects the change in the community.

He admitted there are people in his congregation who are strong supporters of President Trump and his anti-immigration agenda. They want the immigrants to come and give to the church but not lead the church to change.

Rev. Coblenz knows that his church is a place of great cultural diversity, but with diversity comes the great challenge of managing conflict and propagating understanding and a sense of community. Rev. Coblenz reports that many ethnic communities try to form ethnic groups within their cultural context. This creates tension and resistance to what has been the larger community and hinders greater understanding. The pastor needs to create unity within diverse communities and learn to navigate the diverse cultures and traditions. I thought of the previous pastor, Rev. Coblenz's predecessor, someone I knew. Rev. Coblenz admits that beyond the issue of language, there are decisions and actions he can easily get away with compared to his predecessor because of his status as a white heterosexual male.

In discussing his theology, Rev. Coblenz talked about the kingdom of God as the reign of God. Jesus, he emphasized, was all about proclaiming the Kingdom of God. In the recent celebration of World Communion Sunday in their church he saw the sign of

the kingdom of God being present in his church as his multi-racial, multi-cultural congregation together shared the communion table.

According to Rev. Coblentz, a lot of things can distract from the vision and reality of the kingdom of God. His concern is that congregations can be what he called “mere tribalism.” He talked about how in the first few chapters of Genesis the kingdom of God is created and established by God. Everything is perfect and good in the Garden of Eden. And then Adam and Eve, the first human beings disobey God by eating the fruit from the forbidden tree and turn their separate way from God. And since then God has been trying to restore unity and bring us back to God. When I asked him about a theological understanding of “kin-dom,” he responded that kinship in the kingdom of God is our discipleship. He said,

We all bring who we are, and where we're from, and, and all our incredible gifts together to build the kingdom of God. It's like the invitation to the wedding feast that's being made, for all of us being made in God's image. We are called by Christ to pick up our cross, nobody is excluded from that. And anyone who attempts to exclude or put up barriers between us is opposing the kingdom of God and need to be called on that which they are.¹⁰

He likes to preach about the kingdom of God to help his congregation to understand it better. He strongly believes in preaching and teaching and not compromising the gospel, but he does not mean to be insensitive to those who have different views and invites those who oppose his perspective to have a dialogue with him.

¹⁰ Rev. Chuck Coblentz, interview by Anna Thomas, New Dover United Methodist Church, December 27, 2018, Edison, New Jersey.

In understanding kinship in the kingdom of God, Rev. Coblenz believes that we do not proclaim only personal salvation but a relationship with our fellow human beings, a relationship that focuses on the vertical dimension between God and yourself and horizontally between you and your neighbor. He fervently believes that when we exclude others, we ourselves are put out of the kingdom of God. When asked about the root cause of prejudice and fear, he replied that there is a basic human instinct to not like or to fear things that are different and unfamiliar from us. He talked about the “Reptilian Complex” that exists in all human beings and this knowledge he credits to his science background in the field of paleontology. This complex is known as the R-complex and is responsible for human behaviors, which are present in aggression, dominance, territoriality, and ritual displays.

Rev. Coblenz mentioned that in Carl Sagan’s book, *The Dragon of Eden*, Sagan points to the history of the human brain and tells readers about the findings by Paul McLean, a neuroscientist who founded the triune brain theory. McLean states that the reptilian complex in the human brain demonstrates and “plays important role in aggressive behavior, territoriality, ritual and the establishment of social hierarchies.”¹¹ Rev. Coblenz said further on that this makes human beings more fear driven and survival oriented. Survival of the fittest becomes the guiding force. He continues,

But I think that what separates us from the majority, the vast majority of other animals on earth is that we are made in God's image, this is raising of

¹¹ Carl Sagan, *The Dragons of Eden : Speculations on the Evolution of Human Intelligence*, (New York: Random House, 1977), 63.

consciousness, to be able to reflect not just on our own life and death, but also, to go beyond, you know, survival of the fittest type survival strategies and philosophies to go above that and say, No. Here we're we are working on a different level of conscientiousness and compassion that doesn't exist for the most part.¹²

Some animals are kind and gentle. When the prime motivator is fear of other, that's when prejudice sets in. We pre-judge because we see others as different than ourselves and this leads to fear.

Fear as he described it was a very interesting thought and made me realize that fear and being territorial exists in the human brain, but also the image of God is imprinted into our humanity. Humanity is left asking: to whom, then, do we listen? The deeper issue becomes one of reflecting on how fear and survival can be the prime motivators to generate prejudice and hate. I thought about how the issue of immigration and fear mongering that Trump was creating was designed to display prejudice, hate and violence. People have been made to feel that the immigrant invasion is taking away their livelihood and opportunities. Cultivating the spiritual discipline of prayer and thoughtful reflection is very important to help us separate ourselves from reactionary impulsive decisions and to carefully guide us to love and justice.

Rev. Coblenz finds his biblical foundation to embrace immigrants in the scriptures. In the Hebrew Bible, God was reminding the Hebrew people that they were once aliens in the land of Egypt. God was reminding them to be kind to the aliens in their

¹² Coblenz.

midst. In the New Testament the apostle Paul reminded the early church that they are one in the body of Christ. In Galatians 3:28 “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (NRSV).

Rev. Coblenz has started a social justice task force in their church. The task force encouraged the church council to rally behind the immigrants and children entering the southern border of the United States and to condemn the use of force and detention of these immigrants. They also created a consensus among the church community to support those children affected by the abolishing of the DACA act.

Rev. Coblenz is a passionate disciple of Jesus Christ and he strongly believes in furthering the kingdom of God on this earth. He thinks the number one reason church closings are increasing is that the current leaders and members are not opening up to new people in their community. He believes as the world’s population grows there will be a mad rush to survive and share resources. We cannot let violence and hate be the motivating force; rather, the church and the world are to survive through kindness, sharing and caring for each other. For us to survive, faith needs to overcome fear. Recognizing the image of God in every one of us helps us to overcome the suspicions that we have of those who are different from us. God’s story, he reports, is the same old story of good vs. evil, light vs. dark, the kingdom of God versus the kingdom of this world. The kingdom of God is about inclusion and understanding and celebrating diversity, whereas the kingdom of this world is about building walls and barriers. Rev.

Coblentz firmly believes that God “wins” at the end and kingdom of God will win. And our mission is to participate in the here and now to build the kingdom of God.

I am so grateful for friendship and partnership with Rev. Coblentz and working with him in building the kingdom of God in the community of Metuchen and Edison. I was blessed to see a leader immersed in a culture that is different from his and bringing lot of love and compassion. He was at the time of our interview leading a successful bible study to educate the congregation on controversial issues like the issue of homosexuality. He is able to provide the conditions which allow for respect and safety in discussing critically important issues.

2) Interview with Reverend Amoon Sharon

Reverend Amoon Sharon, a Baptist pastor from First Baptist Church of Metuchen, had been sponsored by the church and hired specially to do outreach ministry within the South East Asian community of Metuchen and Edison. He came from Karachi, Pakistan, with his wife and two children and has been living in the mission house of the First Baptist Church. The church supports him financially and helps him in his outreach. I wanted to learn more about his approach to ministry within the conservative values of the Baptist church. I was very much impressed by the church leadership of First Baptist Church of Metuchen to have a vision and ministry action plan for the South East Asian community in Metuchen and Edison.

Rev. Amoon is a passionate disciple of Jesus Christ who works within the South East Asian community. His work is not just among Christians but interfaith communities.

He and his wife continue to engage in the community and minister to the needs of the people. I had the honor and privilege of participating in a missionary outreach in the community. I attended a multicultural community dinner hosted at the church to celebrate the successful completion of ESL classes by the graduates. It was indeed a joy to see the wonderful incarnational experience of ministry in action. People from different faiths and cultures coming together, learning to speak English, and sharing themselves with each other. Rev. Amoon and his wife, Ghazala, had created a safe space in the church through this program to reach out to immigrants and help them in their need and make them whole. Rev. Amoon brought people to Christ through love, friendship, and fellowship. I suspected that his ministry was heavily influenced by a colonial understanding of Christianity. Colonial Christianity believes in the divine mandate to bring Christ to the heathen world by proselytizing them to follow Christ. But I was misguided in my assumption that Rev. Amoon was more interested in making people from other faiths Christians than really creating inter-faith dialogue.

Rev. Amoon and I met at Centenary to start the interview process. He told me that he was born and raised in Pakistan, which is 95 percent Muslim.¹³ His family became Christians through the American missionaries that came many years ago to Pakistan. At age 17 he accepted Jesus Christ as his personal savior. After studying theology in college, Rev. Amoon became a pastor, beginning as a church planter. He started 15 churches in

¹³ Government of Pakistan, "Pakistan Bureau of Statistics," accessed March 13, 2019, <http://www.pbs.gov.pk/content/population-religion>.

Pakistan. He emigrated to the United States just seven years ago with his wife and two kids.

He shared with me a powerful story of transformation. In the year 2002 his wife was almost killed by an Islamic terrorist attack in their church. One Sunday morning when they were worshipping in their home church in Pakistan, they found themselves sprayed with bullets by a terrorist who attacked them. There were 25 pieces of shrapnel lodged in his wife's body. She recovered completely from this tragedy, but fear and hatred grew. Once during a prayer service, they felt a sense that the burden of fear had been taken from their shoulders and they were free from hurt and pain. Their hearts were filled with love for the very people that hurt them. Terrorism came into their lives to introduce bitterness and hate towards Muslims, but God had different plans for them. His wife still has six bullets lodged in her right leg, which the doctors could not take out. She also lost part of her hearing. Their ministry location endured another terrorist attack, so they had to shut down the church they had started, and during this time they found opportunity to do ministry here in the United States. They sought and were granted asylum to emigrate to the United States and in 2017 they became citizens. The First Baptist Church of Metuchen has been instrumental in helping them to establish themselves and their ministry in Metuchen.

Rev. Amoon and his wife have started a South Asian Fellowship in their church. This institute works with people of different faiths. They have also started a free English language class for immigrants in the community. They also offer cooking and cultural learning through this class. I attended the graduation ceremony, and it was a wonderful

occasion where people claimed that their lives were changed because of their experiences in the class. The students of this class came from Nigeria, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Russia, Ukraine, India, and Malaysia.

The students hosted a dinner exhibition from various cultures where Rev. Amoon mentioned that he came to be Christian because of American missionaries who came to Pakistan; however, now Pakistan has strict rules about allowing missionaries to enter. Rev. Amoon believes the door to Pakistan has been closed, but the door to do mission and ministry in the United States has opened as more immigrants are coming to the United States and bringing their own cultures and traditions with them.

Immigration, he suggests, is changing the face of America. There are more mosques and Hindu temples being erected in our neighborhoods. Churches are being shut down and temples and mosques are being raised up. I could see a missional urgency that he was focusing on for the churches in America need to rise to the challenge of converting these immigrants and sharing Christianity.

The colonial definition of mission came to my mind. It was a missionary motif that I had observed in many white missionaries who came to India to convert masses of people in India. The tone was often one of our religion is better than yours, and you need to follow us. In my conversation with Rev. Ammon, I recalled the urgency that I felt when I was in India, which was rooted in the fact that Christianity in America was under attack and they needed to rescue it. Perhaps I remain cynical or suspicious about imperialistic and colonial understandings of faith, mission, and theology that provided the ethical justification of colonization. Such a view was and at times still is based on the

understanding that promotes relinquishing indigenous culture and taking on the culture of the European colonizers. I find this important to keep in mind because a colonial theology creates a monoculture of Christian experience.

Colonialism has encouraged a domineering agenda to Christian mission in the world and can be summarized by a common ideal that we are better than you. According to one set of scholars, "... Replacement oriented theology of mission ... essentially said, 'We are Christian, you are not. Therefore, everything we do is Christian: how we dress and act, the way in which we govern, our social systems and customs, our language and world view. And so, for you to become Christian, everything you are and do must be replaced.'"¹⁴ The obvious culture of replacement in our context was European. I felt discouraged by Rev. Amoon's discussion with me. I asked him if he saw a connection between the missionary hidden motif and the imperialistic agenda.

In his response, Rev. Amoon expressed that he believes that Christ has called us to love all God's people and especially people who are different from us. I asked him about his intention in serving the inter-faith community, to which he replied that his desire is to lead them to Christ in a loving and compassionate way. I asked him further, what if the person does not wish to convert, how would you address that? He says that it

¹⁴ Adrian Jacobs, Richard Twiss and Terry LeBlanc, "Culture, Christian Faith and Error: A Work in Progress," *William Carey International Development Journal* 3, no.2 (2014): 7.

is not his job to convert the person. He wants them to be open to share their culture, philosophy, and way of life without reservation.

Rev. Amoon shared with me that the needs of the immigrant community are genuine. They need all the support they can get, and he continues to meet the immigrants at the point of their need. He is always willing go beyond his way to be there for those in need. He has started a prison ministry within the church in connection with the Middlesex correctional facility. He regularly visits prisons and gets to meet the prisoners, some of whom comes from different parts of the world. He has invited people from his church community who accompany him in this ministry.

In response to my question on his understanding of the kingdom of God, Rev. Amoon thinks that the kingdom of God is solely based on “loving God and loving our neighbor.” He not only believes this, but he continues to practice this principle daily through his ministry. He says that prejudice and fear is due to ignorance and not understanding the other. He thinks when we have little or no interaction with people of another culture, we can be culturally blind or unaware of the culture in context. When we first encounter someone of another culture our natural response is, “They are strange. Why do they do that? That doesn’t make sense. How weird. Their ways are wrong and mine are right.” We box ourselves in ethnocentric understandings and that is common to all peoples. Cultural bigotry impoverishes the Church by marginalizing everyone but “our group.”

Rev. Amoon strongly believes that we need to create a culture of inconvenience to open ourselves to others who are different from us. Jesus loves us despite who we are or

what we have done. God's love is unimaginable towards us. We need to embody this love and forgiveness even when it uncomfortable for us personally. We need to establish a new normal in the art of inconveniencing ourselves for our neighbors.

I was very impressed by the forward thinking of the pastoral and staff leadership of First Baptist Church of Metuchen and the deep passionate love for another human being practiced by Rev. Amoon. I recorded in my research notes that it was the only church that had invested financially and resourcefully to strategically focus on a ministry action plan for immigrants in the communities of Metuchen and Edison. There was a true intentionality followed by dedication and passion to do outreach to the immigrant community in Metuchen. I never thought in my research work I would discover the intentional practice of social justice in a conservative Baptist pastor and parish. They had thought about this plan way ahead of other churches and were executing it thoughtfully. The church was not only planning to make but also empowering disciples for the transformation of the world.

3) Interview with Reverend Justin Karmann

My third interview was with Reverend Justin Karmann, Associate Pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Metuchen. Rev. Karmann has been an associate/youth pastor of this congregation for quite a few years. The church has been in transition and the congregation has had quite a share of interim pastors in that duration of time. In recent years it has become diverse in its membership, but the congregational leadership remains white. The members of the congregation are affluent.

Rev. Karmann has remained faithful to this congregation. He comes from an evangelical Southern Baptist background. He went to a Reformed college to double major in religion and philosophy and then went on to earn a Master of Divinity degree at Princeton Theological Seminary in New Jersey. His ministry with immigrants primarily includes legalization and protection of their rights. He is the youngest clergy member of the Metuchen Edison Area Inter-faith Clergy Association, is of Anglo descent and very much involved in social justice issues that affect the community of Metuchen. He leads a successful youth group for the church, which comprises of 60-80 kids in the community. He has led international and national mission trips for the youth. He leads the Habitat for Humanity mission trip for the church youth and adults. I was very much impressed by his passion for social justice and mission in the community.

First Presbyterian Church's Indonesian Fellowship Ministry worships in the Indonesian language and was established in 1991 to empower new Indonesian immigrants, helping them to assimilate into the community with confidence that their culture is a gift from God that can enrich the society they live in. During Rev. Karmann's tenure, one of the congregants of First Presbyterian Church of Metuchen, Roby Sanger—who is of Indonesian descent—was picked up by ICE while dropping off his daughter to Metuchen High School. This individual and his family are faithful members of this church. People were distraught and did not know what to do. Rev. Karmann, with the help of other church members, reached out to the staff of the church as well as town and state officials to protest Sanger's arrest. After Sanger's arrest a few more arrests occurred

of other Indonesian citizens who were illegally living in this country and were members of the Indonesian Church that worshiped in First Presbyterian Church of Metuchen.

The Anglo congregation and the Indonesian congregation were both in turmoil. Rev. Karmann preached to the congregation to understand the unjust nature of the American immigration system and to encourage the congregation to be supportive of the detained immigrants like Sanger and others held by our government. They held a rally in support of Sanger and against the immigration policies of the Trump administration, which has resulted in ICE agents apprehending and arresting undocumented immigrants as they enter courts and schools, which immigration agents have traditionally ignored or respected as “safe” places. By doing so, the Trump administration is causing widespread panic among undocumented immigrants.

Rev. Karmann and other members of the congregation visited Sanger in the Essex County Correctional facility in Newark, raised close to \$30,000 for his legal aid fund, and worked tirelessly to free him. After few months he was freed on bail. The struggle for his continued stay in the United States with his family and the legal proceeding goes on. Rev. Karmann rallied both congregations to support Sanger and his family, financially and otherwise. I was very impressed with Rev. Karmann’s timely and exceptional leadership in these dangerous and divisive times in bringing the congregation together.

Rev. Karmann believes his role in the parish is mandated by the scripture to serve the widow, orphan, and the alien. He believes we are the hands and feet of Christ for furthering the coming of God’s kingdom. He thinks if we aren’t doing justice and living out mercy, we are not acting as the church ought to. The kingdom of God is heaven come

on earth, the world put back to right, creation made good once more, jubilee, and peace. Jesus' death and resurrection defeated death, preparing the way for the kingdom of God. In a present-sense, we are kingdom bringers— making our earthly environment more like God's intended world. And the kingdom of God will come to completion when Jesus comes once again. His role is to encourage and guide the congregation in justice-related areas such as immigration. Rev. Karmann believes that the kin-ship of the kingdom of God is the understanding that God's family is called as one and operates as one. We are all equal in God's eyes.

When asked about the promises and challenges that he sees in ministry with immigrants, Rev. Karmann said the most challenging things are the daunting nature of the legal system as well as differing cultural expectations. Sometimes he feels so helpless against the legal challenges the immigrants face.

According to Rev. Karmann, the root cause of prejudice and hate is ignorance and misunderstanding. When people come to a realized understanding of the "truth" they are more likely to support those who are not like them. Only God can lovingly uproot the residual hate in people's hearts. The biblical basis for compassion and justice for immigrant ministry emerges from Israel's call to be the light bearer while maintaining God's covenant so that others could witness God's light and love. Within this call God had clear mandates for them in regard to justice and caring for the "other," including people not like them. To summarize, when we are not the hands and feet of Jesus, we aren't reflecting God's kingdom vision and we aren't maintaining our end of the bargain.

Rev. Karmann feels that the congregation will continue to care for the immigrants in “our” own church and community. Baby steps are what bring about change. He feels churches who are doing the broad work of social justice initiatives without a tangible connection locally are causing more harm than good. He feels not all churches are equipped to do all the work required for all immigrant situations. Rev. Karmann says, “One of my mentors likes to say, immigration support is sexy for five minutes and the rest of the time it is really hard work.”

The Bible Studies

Before beginning these studies, I wondered how my small congregation would react to the announcement that their pastor was going to do a bible study on the deeply polarized issue of immigration. I selected seven individuals from the church community who knew the context very well, were regular worship attendees, and came from varied backgrounds in terms of age, ethnicity, and cultures. They were four women and three men. There was no coercion involved, and they agreed to sign the consent form and complete the pre-bible study questionnaire. Before they signed the consent form, I explained to them the purpose of the bible study and that the information gathered from them would not be disseminated to anyone. I also asked them to be completely open and free in answering the questions without any pressure. I also told them that their frank and open answers about the topic of immigration will not cause any tension in our relationship and their standing in the church. If at any point they express discomfort, they will have opportunity for dialogue and if at any time they wish to end participation they

are free to do so without any consequence. The group consisted of three people of Anglo-European decent, one African American, one Caribbean American, one Asian Indian, one Italian American and one Filipino American. I wanted to study and understand people from different groups and what they think and feel.

Centenary has always been a loving and caring faith community. It was a much larger church in the '80's and '90's but has dwindled as members died or moved out of New Jersey. It has always been a majority white congregation with pockets of color here and there. In 2017 Centenary celebrated 150 years in ministry as a proud moment of celebration and historical achievement that can be instrumental in guiding us into our future in this community. In the last 20 years there has been a burst of immigrant population in the community and Centenary has integrated these immigrants as part of the faith community. We have people from 13 different nationalities. Centenary has always attracted immigrants. And yet, Centenary's leadership has continued to be primarily white. Centenary can be described as a conservative, traditional church at its core while welcoming and standing in solidarity with its immigrant church members in times of trial and persecution.

Before I began preparing the bible study lesson plans, I gave the participants a questionnaire that would give me an idea of how they feel about the topic of immigration and how they understand it. I gave the questionnaire a week ahead and asked them to carefully study the questions and return the completed exam to me personally after church. In the questionnaire I asked them to tell me about themselves, to help me understand where they are coming from. I also asked them to assess their environment

within the 5-mile radius of Metuchen and invited them to see mission and ministry in this context. Questions included: What are the challenges and what are the opportunities in this context? I also invited them to think about the kingdom of God in their local context. I encouraged them to see the needs of immigrants in their community. What are the challenges they encounter in their assimilation into the American culture? I urged them to discern what the compassionate response is to the immigrant situation in our neighborhood. What does the Bible say about immigrants? I invited the participants to see the potential and possibilities in this emerging context of immigrants moving into our neighborhoods. I also asked them the challenges that people find in this demographic change. I asked if we were to develop a ministry action plan, how do they perceive themselves in ministry with immigrants in their context as a part of that plan? What will that ministry look like within the 5-mile radius of Centenary?

All the participants in the pre-bible study questionnaire responded with desire to learn and grow in understanding about the immigrant situation. All expressed that immigrants provide an opportunity to know and learn different cultures and is a great opportunity to spread the gospel and meet new people. Some of participants shared scriptures about showing kindness to the alien or foreigner mandated by God. Below I present four studies held over a four-week period. I provide the content of each session as it was given. Each week, I began with a ritual or practice.

Study 1: Strangers Next Door — Changing Demographics, Identities, Attitudes

On Sunday, January 7, 2019, we did our first bible study after the worship service. We made a covenant with each other that we will gather every Sunday after worship for an hour bible study. The seven individuals that signed up for this interview are devout Christians and committed individuals. I deeply appreciate their pioneering spirit and enthusiasm to participate. Others in the congregation were curious to join, so at the last minute we had a new addition of a member of the church council and a long-standing member of Centenary who joined the group. I was always worried about how this study was going to influence the minds of these individuals and their standing in the church. How will this affect their relationships in their families and within the church. Will anything change in their life? Will they talk about this to others? Or remain the same? Are they taking a risk to be included in this endeavor? I am proud of their dedication and commitment to this study and desire to listen and hear me out.

I borrowed the title, “Changing Demographics, Changing Identities and Changing Attitudes” from the website, “Teaching Tolerance,” which is designed for teachers and educators to be active participants in diverse democracy.¹⁵ I was also influenced by a book by J. D. Payne titled, *Strangers Next Door: Immigration, Migration, and Mission*.¹⁶ My desire for this topic was to introduce the reality of what was

¹⁵ <https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/tolerance-lessons/changing-demographics-changing-identity-changing-attitudes>.

¹⁶ Jervis David Payne, *Strangers Next Door: Immigration, Migration, and Mission* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2012),

happening in the 5-mile radius of the church community. The demographic is changing, and it is affecting the community dynamics in the neighborhood.

American people, who are the essence of what America is and will be, have continued to struggle ideologically and practically with the question of, “Who is ‘we the people’?” What shapes American identity? Who is included in the public discourse of “we the people?” Are Native Americans, African Americans, and immigrants included in this picture of American identity? In the American constitution, the phrase, “We the people,” historically represented elite white men. It was more about “I am” than “we are.”

I began by inviting the group to a time of silent prayer and coming together in silence and meditative spirit. I lit a candle reminding them that we are inviting God’s presence among us, around us, and in us as we gather together in this holy time and space. I poured the water into the basin to draw attention to the waters of baptism that flow through our lives awakening us to our identity in Jesus Christ as beloved children of God. The intentional reminder of baptismal waters was to draw attention to the fact that we are chosen by God, not because of what we have done but because God loves us. Baptism marks us as God’s chosen people adopted and entrusted with furthering God’s kingdom in this world. Our closeness is not a sign of our pride and privilege but a constant reminder that we are also broken people who need God’s grace in their lives. Brokenness is not a deal breaker but a sign of our everlasting covenant with a God who chose to love us. Water is the sign of the Holy Spirit that enters our lives to transform us

into God's people. I wanted the participants to see immigrants as broken people of God but loved and integral part of the kingdom of God.

I picked the song "Welcome" from the *Worship & Song* book by the United Methodist Church, which is a wonderful inspirational song that invites the participants to walk together in a journey to build a world where love can grow, and hope can enter in.¹⁷ It invites the singer to dream a world that cares for the least of the least—a new Jerusalem. It helps to recognize that we are called to be the hands of healing and to plant the seeds of peace in this world. We called to be in solidarity with the poor and hurting world and share the feast that God offers us throughout life. Power cannot be used as a force of destruction and dominion but to bring about transformational change to empower justice and change. As the participants were singing this song, I wanted them to see this new border space where love, hope, and peace prevails. The powerful words of this song were welcoming them to see their faith community as a reflection of God's kingdom where there is solidarity with immigrants.

The participants then watched a video presentation showing the reading of Emma Lazarus' poem, "The New Colossus," by different immigrants — this being the poem that is engraved inside the Statue of Liberty.¹⁸ Lazarus wrote this sonnet to raise money

¹⁷ Laurie Zelman, "Welcome," *Worship & Song Singer's Edition* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), no. 3152.

¹⁸ Emma Lazarus, "The New Colossus," performed by The Clients and Employees of the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO) in Portland, Oregon. [Http://www.irco.org](http://www.irco.org), *YouTube*, February 8, 2017, accessed January 6, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=InHwqbhPak4&t=11s>.

for the building of the base. The poem is now engraved on a bronze plaque and contained inside the Statue of Liberty. It was poignant and very moving to see this poem read by people who are immigrants from different nations, cultures, and speaking different languages. I could see a sense of amazement on the faces of the bible study participants about the face of America in this 21st century.

I wanted the bible study participants to look at this iconic towering statue of Lady Liberty welcoming the immigrants on its shore at a time in our nation's history when immigration has become a wedge. It is a potent and resonant symbol reminding us of who we are and what makes us Americans. Most of us have visited the Statue of liberty to learn about our family's immigration history. We here in America make the promise that whatever the immigrants are running away from we will make sure that everyone will be treated equally. With a broken chain at lady Liberty's feet, the monument was conceived in France as a celebration of the abolition of slavery and the Union's victory in the Civil War.

I asked the bible study participants to think about scriptures that guide their thinking concerning the intention of God in creating human beings. We then discussed Gen. 1:26-27,

Then God said, "Let us make humankind^[a] in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth,^[b] and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. So God created humankind^[c]

in his image, in the image of God he created them;^[d] male and female he created them.

I invited the participants to see God's image in themselves and each other and then move their attention to see the face of God in the face of immigrants, refugees, and undocumented immigrants. I gave them some time to reflect on what that means for them. Identity is important to every human being; it gives them a definition and sense of self. Immigrants grapple with various identities and learn to navigate these waters well. I am an Asian Indian American. To be Indian is to have my ethnicity matter in all things, but to be American is not have it matter at all, supposedly. It is ironic and — given the inability of the state to adequately marry these two binaries — unsurprising that race and ethnicity are difficult concepts to examine and contend with in America.

We then shared some scriptures from the Old and the New Testament that guide us to see the immigrants in our midst. Exodus 22:21 reads, “You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.” Matthew 25:35-40 states,

³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸ And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹ And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ ⁴⁰ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family,^[a] you did it to me.’

Then I introduced the group to some statistical information about the demographic changes that are happening in the country and the neighborhood. One of the graphs showed the steady increase in foreign born populations reaching 45 million in

2015 and projected to reach to 78 million by the year 2065.¹⁹ In Metuchen, the number of foreign- born residents has increased 21.2%.²⁰ Also, the percentage of languages that are spoken other than English has increased. In Edison the number of foreign-born residents has reached 45.9 percent.²¹

Then I invited the group to read the article by Clarence Page in the *Chicago Tribune* published on May 23, 2012, titled, “America’s Uneasy Browning.” The group was asked to reflect on some points of the article, like what is causing America’s browning. As immigrants from the global south are arriving, there is a shift in the shade of color of the immigrants entering the United States. People from the global south are a darker shade. By the year 2042, the American census bureau says, there will be no racial majority in America:

White babies are no longer a majority of new births, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. America is quietly "browning," it is said, like dinner rolls in a warm oven. Yet such change does not come about without resistance from those who prefer to remain unbaked. White supremacist groups have been having a "meltdown," says Mark Potok of the Southern Poverty Law Center, which monitors hate groups.²²

¹⁹ Gustavo Lopez and Jynnah Radford, "Key Findings About U.S. Immigrants," November 30, 2018, *Pew Research Center*, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/11/30/key-findings-about-u-s-immigrants/>.

²⁰ Neighborhood Scout, *Race and Ethnic Diversity in Metuchen, Nj*, accessed January 6, 2019, <https://www.neighborhoodscout.com/nj/metuchen/demographics>.

²¹ Neighborhood Scout, *Race and Ethnic Diversity in Edison, Nj*, accessed January 6, 2019, <https://www.neighborhoodscout.com/nj/metuchen/demographics>.

²² Clarence Page, "America's Uneasy 'Browning,'" *Chicago Tribune*, May 23, 2012, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-2012-05-23-ct-oped-0523-page-20120523-story.html>.

Some of the white participants talked about their white friends feeling alarmed by the changing face of America. There was an unease that was causing fear and uncertainty. Some participants expressed the fear that their friends were feeling that immigrants are taking over America. One of white participants was shaken by the sentiments that this article was bringing out in the open. He questioned the authenticity of the article and the hidden agenda of the author. There was almost a sudden jolt of awareness of white propaganda and a sincere questioning of the intention of the article. Others authenticated the sentiments that the author of the article was expressing as truthful sentiments of many white Americans.

I asked the group how they felt about immigration in general. One of participants of Caribbean descent spoke about coming to America as little girl and living in Michigan. She was the only black girl on her school bus. She was always instructed by her parents to not pay attention to racial slurs or injustice; just be good and the world will be good to you. The small-town church they attended embraced them wholeheartedly and made them feel welcome. She expressed that when you are a small fish in a big pond you learn the tricks of survival among the fittest.

We talked about the prejudice and hate immigrants face. One of the older members shared about when Centenary was lily white. The first African American couple to join the church experienced racism. But this couple continues to be one of the cherished and beloved members of Centenary.

This older member went on to say that in 1954, when *Brown vs. Board of Education* passed into law ending school segregation, he was a member of the large all-

white Baptist church in town. When it was time for Vacation Bible school, the black kids in town came at their door to be enrolled, but they were turned away by the pastor and the church leaders, who said it was not their kind of program.

We also talked about language and customs of immigrants. The group agreed immigrants can keep their customs and culture. Some of the people in the group very vehemently insisted that immigrants need to speak English so we can understand what they are saying. Conversational English needs to be encouraged so immigrants and their children can do better in America. I noticed that some of the immigrants who are new to the country remained silent.

One of the participants in the bible study group shared her story of coming to America and living in a small two-bedroom apartment with another Indian family from Centenary. They were grateful for this family's radical hospitality and welcome. They felt very much at home and fell in love with town of Edison, nicknamed, "India town."

One of the bible study participants talked about his family moving to Long Island from Italy and experiencing subtle or sometimes outright racist behavior from his neighbors. He remembers his father receiving prank calls from people asking him to show his green card.

I shared my own experience about my son who was just five years old asking me if he was American. My son is a natural born citizen of America, and it broke my heart to hear his pain. I knew as a mother that in his school someone had made him feel like a foreigner and questioned his heritage as Asian American.

We talked about how legal immigration is a very lengthy process. You need money to pay the immigration lawyers and government immigration fees. It is very difficult for poor people to migrate to America. You need to have higher education and the skill set of a highly qualified worker to legally migrate to the United States. The immigration system in America is highly biased in its selection of foreign-born citizens.

We also discussed the benefits of having immigrants come to the United States. Immigrants will often do the jobs that people in America are not willing to do or cannot do. Migrant workers often work longer hours for lower salaries. Immigrants, when made welcome in America, can become a resource that increases the talent pool. Immigrants bring diversity and a wealth of resources from their life experiences. Undocumented immigrants are underpaid, overworked, abused without benefits, and suffer from restricted working conditions in our communities. It was very interesting to talk and think about these issues affecting millions of people who sit right beside us in the church pews and walk past us in our communities and neighborhoods.

The first bible study ended with a responsive prayer that awakened us to the reality that God is calling us to see the stranger and the immigrant among us. I invited the group to know that we are all sojourners in the foreign land and our ultimate citizenship is in heaven with God. Therefore, we are called to listen to the cries of the immigrant, the orphan, the widow, the poor and destitute.

Bible Study 2: Migratory God — the Bible and Immigration

The second bible study was held on the next Sunday, January 13, after worship service in the chapel. We began with a time for silence and inviting people to bring their prayer needs in front of the group as we light a candle. The topic for the second bible study was “Migratory God — the Bible and Immigration.” Through this session my desire was to move the understanding of the participants from the demographic changes in the community to the biblical interpretation and significance of migration and the issue of immigration. I wanted them to discover their own implicit bias. Migration is a central theme of the Bible. By hearing stories of people on the move I hoped to develop specific mission and ministry strategies to work with the immigrant communities in our neighborhood.

Once again, we poured water is poured into the basin to remind us of our baptism and all its significance. I then invited the group to sing, “Draw the Circle Wide.”²³ People in our congregation are very familiar with this song. It is a song I selected to remind us that we share in this calling as followers of Jesus Christ to make the circle of faith larger. “Draw the circle wide, Draw it wider still. No one stands alone. We’ll stand side by side.” I emphasized through the singing of the song that we need to open our doors, our hearts, and our minds to make immigrants in our community a part of God’s family. Then I introduced the group to a visual liturgy titled, “Migratory God,” by Phuoc Luu from the website *The Work of the People*. Phuoc Luu was born in Vietnam and raised in Houston,

²³ Gary Alan Smith, “Draw the Circle Wide,” *Worship & Song Singer’s Edition* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), no. 3154.

Texas. He works towards integration and writes about the intersection of art, philosophy, and theology. He has taught philosophy and theology at Sam Houston State University and Houston Baptist University and is working on a forthcoming book, *Jesus of the East*.²⁴ The liturgy is a tapestry of wonderfully interwoven words telling a story of God and God's people with images of immigrants and refugee. It is a story of the movement of God and God's people.

After watching this video presentation, I began with these words as my reflection and own interpretation of the understanding of this liturgical presentation. I said, friends, our God is a migratory God who is constantly on the move. And we are his people moving in God's dance of grace and salvation. Our God is the God of movement. Moving people from one place to another and moving with them, in them and through them. Moving from pain and suffering to joy and hope. Moving from hopelessness and despair to courage and strength. Our God is a restless God, constantly pursuing and seeking the wellbeing of his beloved people.

I drove home this point by referencing several stories of the Bible, including Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Naomi and Ruth. Then we read from Exo. 22:21, "You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt." Then I invited the participants to reflect and think about if they had to move from

²⁴ Phuc Luu, "Migratory God," accessed January 13, 2019, <https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/migratory-god>.

one place to another and how that experience was. I also asked them to think about the question, "Why do people move, leaving behind everything familiar and heading to far off lands that are so different from their homeland?"

The participants formed two groups and shared their experiences of moving. One of the group members shared his experience of moving from Long Island, New York, to Metuchen, and how difficult it was. Another young Indian lady in the group shared her family's journey to the United States from India. They were deeply worried about their future-plans of settling in America, they had no place to live until they could secure a job. She recalls that they were very fortunate to find friends in Edison that they knew from back home who helped them tremendously. The family provided them with housing, transportation to work and school for the children, and took care of their economic needs. It was so wonderful to be in a town like Edison that reminded them of being back home in India. They are very grateful for this Indian friend who took care of them till they could find their own footing in this country. And through this family they found a community of faith that loves them and cares for them here at Centenary.

I shared my own experience about coming to America and not being able understand people in conversations I had with them because of the unfamiliarity with the slang and nuances in the spoken American English. It used to be very embarrassing and difficult to maintain a decent conversation with people. I had to learn to drive and find a job. It was the church members who always came to our rescue and provided us with things and support. One of the participants shared that his parents came from Finland to

America in the 1920's to seek a better future for themselves and their family. Almost all came to the United States to seek a better life and better future, risking everything.

Similar experience was shared by an African American member about moving from one place to another because his dad served in the military. They were always on the move to wherever dad was stationed. It was hard to pick up the pieces and put down roots somewhere else. He shared about his experience growing up in Louisiana during the '70's. His family had recently moved into the neighborhood when they were awakened at 3 a.m. by a cross burning on their front lawn. He was just 13. Neighbors knocked and the fire department came. This was his introduction to racial violence, hatred, and bigotry that existed in America and continues to exist.

One participant said that growing up in Jamaica they did not see their own color. But when they came to America, they saw discrimination because of skin color. Her dad was black, and her mother was Indian, but they considered themselves Jamaicans first.

I asked the group to state the groups of people that God considers the most vulnerable, whom God urges the people of God to take care of always. The group replied that throughout the Bible God has asked his people to be take care of widows, orphans, and the poor. We then discussed the story of Ruth and compared that narrative to the predicament of immigrants. It was not intended to simply spiritualize and overlook biblical lessons that are politically and culturally incorrect. Instead, I wanted to challenge some core theological, biblical, and political beliefs. Some of those beliefs are that immigration is not something biblical and has nothing to do with God. I wanted to emphasize the message that people's migration is part of God's plan for the redemption of

humanity. Hopefully this would help the group and the church in general to be more welcoming towards the immigrants. I also invited the group to read the story of the apostle Peter and Cornelius the Roman official in Acts 10, an important story to help the participants in the bible study to recognize how biases and prejudice can affect immigrants.

During the question and answer session I asked the participants how God is moving Centenary today. One of the oldest members in the bible study group shared that in 1975 Centenary worked on sponsoring seven refugees from Vietnam. The church sponsored two single young men and brought them over to the United States and took care of them. The church members took them grocery shopping and provided them necessary things. They taught them to drive. Ten years later the church helped some Polish refugees and gave them shelter and took care of them.

In the book of Ruth, Ruth's checkered past brings forth the issue of her legal status in the land of Israel. In the bible study I shared a video clip from National Justice for Our Neighbors, an immigration ministry of the United Methodist Church.²⁵ The clip was titled, "Imagine," and talked about different immigrants going through immigration issues, feeling helpless, and finding nowhere to go for help. The video gave an example of a women who is enduring the beating of her husband and cannot go anywhere because she can be deported. The audience is invited to imagine a kid from Honduras running

²⁵ National Justice For Our Neighbors, "Imagine," April 27, 2016, video, accessed January 13, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC5n-Qnfpw6IruM37ZITiUsQ>.

from gang violence in his hometown. National Justice not only provides for the needs of immigrants and participate in advocacy but also provide legal counsel for poor immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. They also engage in advocacy for immigrant justice and offer education to communities of faith and to the public.

I shared with the group that I received help when I attended a clinic in Brooklyn, New York, arranged by National Justice, that helped me to secure proper legal counsel and information. The lawyer that gave us the information was the one that helped me and my family to get our green cards and then our citizenship. I told the group this was the best information and assistance I received from this organization. It was very reliable, helpful, and low cost. Many times, immigrants fall prey to immigration lawyers who are frauds and cheat you of valuable cash.

Through the stories of Ruth and Cornelius we learned that our God includes the immigrants and gentiles into the kingdom of God. I questioned the greatness that Trump talks about so passionately in his speeches. Jesus emptied himself on the cross of Calvary to save us. The almighty God became powerless to show us what true strength and power means to humanity. The cross is a reminder of a God who willingly chose to give away power and dominion to show humanity how to rise in humility and compassion. I ask myself again and again how we the church could represent the crucified God in serving the immigrant, undocumented, and refugee through showing solidarity and compassion.

We ended the bible study with a prayer to guide the group to open their hearts and minds to the needs of the immigrants and refugees. They sit beside us and walk with us on the streets but sometimes we don't know the very people that seem to be our friends.

We made a commitment that we will be more open to the leading of the Holy Spirit to respond graciously to the needs of immigrants. We closed the session with a poignant and beautiful summarizing of the spiritual thirst for justice in the four-fold Franciscan

Blessing:

May God bless you with a restless discomfort about easy answers, half-truths and superficial relationships, so that you may seek truth boldly and love deep within your heart.

May God bless you with holy anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that you may tirelessly work for justice, freedom, and peace among all people.

May God bless you with the gift of tears to shed with those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation, or the loss of all that they cherish, so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and transform their pain into joy.

May God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you really CAN make a difference in this world, so that you are able, with God's grace, to do what others claim cannot be done.

And the blessing of God the Supreme Majesty and our Creator, Jesus Christ the Incarnate Word who is our brother and Savior, and the Holy Spirit, our Advocate and Guide, be with you and remain with you, this day and forevermore.

AMEN.²⁶

Bible Study 3: The Kingdom of God and Immigration

On Sunday, January 20, we began our third bible study in the chapel with silence and inviting the participants to center their hearts and minds. The topic of this bible study was, “The Kingdom of God and Immigration.” Today, immigration has been catapulted to one of the most divisive issues in America and across the western world. Depending on what side of the argument you take, you are either a righteous, compassionate saint or

²⁶ Mike Farley, "A Four-Fold Franciscan Blessing " *The Mercy Blog*, October 24, 2011, accessed January 13, 2019, <https://themericyblog.blogspot.com/2011/10/four-fold-franciscan-blessing.html>.

you're a fascist, xenophobic bigot. Everyone is compelled to take sides and church and church people are no exception. My desire was to unearth a deeper connection to the understanding of the kingdom of God and kinship in the kingdom of God with respect to interpersonal connection.

We lit a candle to remind us that as God walked with the people of Israel in the wilderness, God continues to walk with us in our personal and communal journey of life. God never leaves us or forsakes us in the quest of life. I again poured the water in the basin. Theologian Cheryl Peterson cites Susan Wood concerning baptism:

In baptism we do not claim Christ as much as Christ claims us, and he does so irrevocably. Further, faith and the Spirit unite you to Christ, but not to the body of Christ, the church. It is in the eucharist that you are not only communing with Christ but with his whole body. To go back to Paul's admonition in I Corinthians 11, the eucharist is not only about your personal desire to know Christ more deeply, but about what it means to be a member of the crucified and risen body of Christ—and members one of another in that body. The two sacraments work together to fully incorporate persons into a salvific relationship with God in Christ as well as into a relationship with the members of the body of Christ.²⁷

By invoking the baptismal covenant, I wanted the bible study participants to realize they are grafted into the body of Christ and are called to adapt and adopt the principles of the kingdom of God. And this means to seek justice for voiceless immigrants. I invited the participants to sing the song "We are Called" from the *Worship and Song* book in the United Methodist Church. The song is written by David Has, a

²⁷ Cheryl Peterson, "Font to Table and Table to Font?" *Lutheran Forum*, March, 2008, accessed March 14, 2019, <https://www.lutheranforum.com/blog/font-to-table-or-table-to-font?rq=Font%20to%20Table>.

prominent Catholic composer from the mid 1980's. The inspiring words by the author have a foundation in Micah 6:8, telling the readers and listeners that God wants us to promote justice, humility, and live faithfully following the commands of God. The song invites the listeners to a dream and envisions a panoramic view of the kingdom of God and what it is about. The kingdom of God is a kingdom where we learn to live in the light of God and freedom. We are called to act with justice, love tenderly, and serve one another through humility. By introducing this song, I was reminding the participants to act with justice towards the immigrants in our community. It was a reminder to open their hearts and minds to be kind and compassionate to those who have lost hope in their struggle with the unjust immigration system of our times. The words of the song and music bring a gentle push to rekindle the flame of the Holy Spirit to awaken in them an understanding of kinship between them and the immigrant community.

The study group talked about people who have been wrongfully persecuted because they belong to a certain race or country. The undocumented workers who work in the shops in Oak Tree Street in Edison are underpaid and exploited by the shopkeepers. There is always a fear among that they will be taken away by ICE and held in the detention centers and forever separated from their families. One of the participants in the group shared how she saw that when government officials came to her office, all the workers who did not have papers vanished.

I challenged the bible study participants to put themselves within the story of the good Samaritan and think of themselves as the man in the ditch. People are walking past them and offering no help. How does that make them feel? I then asked them to put

themselves in the shoes of countless undocumented immigrants or refugees. They are seeking a better life for themselves and their families but are being separated from their children and families and held in a detention center against their will. I wonder who will hear their cries and listen to their pain and suffering.

The bible study group watched a video by Brian McLaren. McLaren is an American pastor, author, activist, and speaker and leading figure in the emerging church movement. McLaren is also associated with postmodern Christianity and progressive Christianity, and is a major figure in post-evangelical thought. McLaren believes that Jesus came to show us the glimpse of what kingdom of God looks like here on this earth. We can experience God's kingdom where our families and children live.

I then invited the participants to think about the people in these immigrant stories of frustration and heart-breaking turmoil. I encouraged the participants to close their eyes and imagine these people before them. Can they imagine and understand their heartache and pain. As Daisy Maehado has written,

The undocumented worker, the unnamed woman, lives literally and figuratively within the open wound that is the U.S/ Mexico border. She is between worlds and excluded from the conditions of full thriving in both. She is the ultimate outsider with no alternatives, no legal rights, no voice, no access to protection from those who have the power to exploit her labor and even her body. Fear, humiliation, exploitation, poverty and even physical abuse are a part of her reality, and to talk about justice for these women means to call into question the very structures of our society that are capable of such injustice.²⁸

²⁸ Emily Askew, "Critical Spatiality: Mhay's Room and the Kingdom of God," *Lexington Theological Quarterly (Online)* 45, no. 3-4 (2013): 73.

I invited the participants to elicit contemporary images of the kingdom of God in our church and community. The group celebrated the vacation bible school that we run during the summer which has been a fantastic ministry with children and families from diverse backgrounds. We began this program five years back with much hesitancy. We did not know how many children would come, if we would have enough volunteers, and if we would be able to make it a financially viable ministry. We have continued to grow this program and last year we had 50 kids and 30 adult volunteers and parents that we feed. Every year we get the necessary funding and support for doing this from our church community.

The group talked about the social justice work that the church was involved in by working with a church in Trenton, New Jersey. We collected one thousand five hundred diapers for kids who come from underprivileged families in Trenton. Trenton has become a city riddled with issues of gang violence and poverty. Kids are malnourished and parents do not have enough to put food on the table let alone pay for diapers. The kids need a place they can know that they are loved and cared for. The Maker's Place church in Trenton invited our partner churches in the annual conference to collect diapers and give to the poor kids. The church envisions throwing a birthday party for these kids so they can feel being loved and connected. Our youth group and leaders of the church are going to go.

At the end of this third bible study I discovered a sincere urge to do ministry that was going to directly impact the lives of immigrants. One of the participants asked what can we do now to help the immigrant community? It was not that they were not already

doing so through their connections within the church community; they were. Someone mentioned Roby Sanger, discussed earlier. I shared with the bible study group about my recent visit to First Friends of NJ & NY, a non-profit organization that advocates for the rights of detained immigrants and asylum seekers. First Friends is a 501(c)(3) organization that promotes compassion and hope through volunteer visitation, resettlement assistance, and advocacy. I invited the bible study participants to think about what they can do to help people who are hurting and penalized for being poor and overstaying their visa. I told the bible study group that I have signed up as a volunteer to assist a detainee in the prison. Churches that support First Friends of NJ & NY help in collecting books and literature that the immigrants can read and satisfy their psychological and intellectual thirst. They also collect stamps for the immigrants so that they can mail letters to their families and inform them of their wellbeing. Churches host volunteer appreciation luncheons or other organizational functions to meet the costs. The organization is primarily responsible for the immigrants to be rehabilitated into the general society. Volunteers pick the immigrants up when they are released from the jail and house them temporarily. We came up with few ways our church can join in this effort, like collecting stamps & stationary. I also encouraged them to join a program to visit some of the facilities where the undocumented are detained. We live in a culture that is highly individualized, busy, consumer driven, and declining in civic engagement. By introducing First Friends of NJ & NY I wanted the group to notice that they truly can be part of this wonderful opportunity to care for others and in turn enrich themselves.

One of the persons in the group suggested that we check with movers and shakers in the church about our involvement in this ministry. He was suggesting that this was a controversial topic and needs to be discussed further with the wider community so we can make a commitment to be involved. It is interesting how this comment made people nervous to upset the status quo in the congregation. I could almost sense that there were underlying issues that people were not ready to discuss.

To close this bible study session, we read the “Immigrants Creed”:

We believe in almighty God, who guided God’s people in exile and in exodus, the God of Joseph in Egypt and of Daniel in Babylon, the God of foreigners and immigrants. We believe in Jesus Christ a displaced Galilean, who was born away from his people and his home, who had to flee the country with his parents when his life was in danger, and who upon returning to his own country had to suffer the oppression of the tyrant Pontius Pilate, the servant of a foreign power. He was persecuted, beaten, tortured, and finally accused and condemned to death unjustly. But on the third day, this scorned Jesus rose from the dead, not as a foreigner but to offer us citizenship in heaven. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the eternal immigrant from God’s Kin-dom among us, who speaks all languages, lives in all countries, and reunites all races. We believe that the church is the secure home for all foreigners and believers who constitute it; it speaks the same language and has the same purpose. We believe that the communion of saints begins when we accept the diversity of the saints. We believe in forgiveness, which makes us all equal, and in reconciliation, which identifies us more than does race, language or nationality. We believe that in the Resurrection, God will unite us as one people in which all are distinct, and all are alike at the same time. We believe in the eternal life beyond this world, where no one will be an immigrant, but all will be citizens of God’s Kin-dom that has no end. Amen.²⁹

²⁹ Joan Maruskin, "Leader's Guide: Immigration and the Bible: A Guide for Radical Welcome, " *United Methodist Women* (2012), 36. <http://christianchurchestogether.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Immigration-Bible-Leaders.pdf>.

Reading this creed brought us to the wholistic picture of the God we worship and adore. The God of the Bible is also the God of the immigrants and unites us all into the everlasting bond of kin-ship with God and God's people.

Bible Study 4: Paradigm Shift and Missional Imagination

The fourth and final bible study took place on Sunday, January 26, in the little chapel in church. The title of the bible study was, "Paradigm Shift in Mission: Missional Imagination." For the last bible study, I wanted to redefine what the mission of the church was in this new emerging context of changing demographics, to broaden our horizons about mission and open hearts to see and participate in God's reign on the highways and byways of the world. Whether we like the word globalization or not we need to recognize that we live in a world that is more and more inter-cultural and cross-cultural.

We began the bible study with the moment of silence inviting the group to center their minds and reprioritize to focus on the topic at hand. I once again poured the water in the basin reminding the promise of baptism and being a part of God's plan. I invited the bible study participants to once again sing the song "We are Called."

We then started with the question, what is the mission of God? We discussed this in reference to Genesis 1 and 2 and to Jesus. The mission of the church is clearly stated in Matt. 28:18-20: "And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.'" This biblical mandate for

the church is referred to as the Great Commission of Jesus Christ. The great commission spells out clear directives to disciples of Jesus Christ. This universal mandate given by Jesus prompted the early Christians long before the nineteenth century to embark on a mission. This mission was intended to extend the gospel to all nations, including Africa, in order to make more converts, expand the church, and thus hasten the coming of Jesus Christ. This command in the past has been misinterpreted and used as the explanation for imperialism in foreign lands. However, I encouraged the bible study participants to recognize that we are also called by God to be sent as God's people out into missions. We are the people of God sent to establish the kingdom of God here in the 5-mile radius of our church community. I asked, in light of the demographic changes in our community, how do you see the mission of God in this emerging context?

We continued the bible study by reading Luke 24:13-33, which tells of a walk to Emmaus. In the walk to Emmaus, Christ shows up, but the disciples have not recognized their beloved Jesus. I asked the bible study participants: do you think Jesus can meet us as an undocumented immigrant or refugee? Who is the stranger in the text? Who are the strangers in our community? How do we create room for new experiences and new friends in our lives when familiarity becomes a norm? How do we understand this statement: the world is at our door step within our missional context?

I shared data about immigration and the impact on church community from a *Sojourner* article titled, "Not a 'White' Christmas: Future of Christianity in the World."

This article details the increase in people of color in the United States.³⁰ In response, the bible study group talked about the tremendous amount of resistance to use of drums during the singing of praise songs in worship. The traditional Anglo-centered older congregation vehemently opposed it. Then we received the drum set as a gift from another congregation. Now we have a young adult play it regularly, and the congregation has come to enjoy and love the music.

I then invited the bible study group to watch a video presentation by the Texas Annual Conference of the United Methodist church. This presentation showed the missional imagination of a pastor, church, and Texas annual conference responding to the changing demographics in the city of Houston, Texas, with creativity and missional passion. The Westbury United Methodist church started the Fondren Apartment Ministry with Associate Pastor Reverend Hannah Terry. They started this ministry so they could meet the needs of refugee and immigrant communities. In the Fondren apartments they have refugees from El-Salvador, Burundi, Eritrea, Bhutan, Congo and Rwanda who have fled war, violence, and starvation to find asylum in the United States.

The church stepped out of its comfort zone and started building relationships with its neighbors. Rev. Terry and some of the staff moved into the neighborhood. Rev. Terry began a bible study in her apartment and invited her neighbors. Rev. Terry says, "... we know that God was in our neighborhood. We just needed to engage our neighbors, learn

³⁰ Wes Granberg Michaelson, "Not A "White" Christmas," *Sojourners*, December 21, 2018, <https://sojo.net/articles/not-white-christmas>.

from each other, establish trust and build solid relationships. That's what enable us to work together to help bring about the world that God imagines."³¹

At the Fondren apartments, residents eat together and share a pot-luck communal meal once a week. They have started English as a special language classes for those who want to learn to speak the English fluently. The ministry also helps them with employment opportunities and has started a garden.

The intention behind showing this video presentation was to help my congregation to think beyond their walls to the possibilities of mission and faith. The church is always accustomed to thinking about mission in their four walls while the hurting community waits outside for healing and help. I wanted the bible study participants to open their hearts and minds and dream of meaningful possibilities in their faith community by helping them to see how a little bit of imagination can make them creative and engaged missionally in their own community.

I invited the participants to think about what the ministry action plan might look like for their faith community. What is God calling them to do for the immigrant community right here? Further on I helped the participants to think creatively about the actual steps they will take to make ministry happen in the faith community. I wanted them to point out the specific direction they will go to be intentional and actively engage

³¹ Hannah Terry, "Missional Imagination," accessed on January 27, 2019, <https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/missional-imagination>.

the church in mission with immigrants. I asked them to ponder questions like, “What will worship, music and language look like when we are engaging in ministry with immigrants?” “What will our leadership look like?” And ultimately, I wanted them to visualize how their community of faith might look like when we live in unity and diversity celebrating each other and our unique heritage. I ended the questions with a quick glimpse through a pictorial representation of the surrounding community. A picture from the community surrounding Centenary helped the bible study participants to see their neighborhood with fresh eyes and minds.

One of the participants works as the music director for Centenary. He spoke about being inspired to select music from different genres of music and languages and committed to introduce Centenary with music from different traditions and cultures. The group agreed that leadership needs to reflect the changing demographics because then we can hear differing voices.

We talked in the bible study group about how those who have come into the United States by following the legal proceedings are talking down to the undocumented immigrants. They are saying that the undocumented immigrants need to enter the United States through proper channels. They cannot jump the hoop and expect there will be no consequences. We talked in the group about the economic disparity between the rich and the poor. People with good education and money have far better chances to emigrate to the United States than poor and uneducated people. There are asylum seekers who have no way to return to their home country because their home is destroyed and there is a big possibility that they can be killed if they return. One of the participants in the group

talked about working in a company in the administrative section. She was first-hand witness to an unexpected ICE raid at the company shed. She saw people running away from their job and leaving behind their lunch boxes or other stuff, never to return because of the fear of being thrown into an immigration detention center.

Deut. 31:6 reads, “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.” I am grateful for the people in my small bible study group from Centenary for their time and desire to learn and grow. They all enjoyed the learning process. It was not an easy time to be engaged in this process when news media and the social and political climate was not conducive. I admire their strength and courage to remain in the learning process. I believe I was able to create a space where we could have healthy conversation and dialogue about immigration and its implications for the people around us. Some of the participants were very grateful for the biblical understanding that was undergirding our theology.

The participants agreed that we need to further explore ministry opportunities within our community to meet the need of the immigrants and refugees. We also thought about talking with Rev. Amoon Sharon and working with him to have a clinic for immigrants in our neighborhood. Instead of being exploited and cheated by fraudulent immigration lawyers, we can invite lawyers and other organizations that do pro-bono work. But I recognized that there was hesitancy in moving forward because we do not have the church council on board with this idea.

We ended the bible study by reading the Immigrants Creed once more.³² I wanted them to recite this creed with me so we could better understand the God of foreigners and immigrants. Who is this mysterious we and incarnational God who chooses us again and again not because of who we are but because of who God happens to be? God is love and the kingdom of God is a place of love and healing. There is no kingdom without kinship and there is no kinship without loving relationship with each other. The mission of God is to help us to move beyond our native tribalism and individualistic culture to see the world through God's eyes and love it.

³² Maruskin, 36.

CHAPTER 4: DISCOVERY, MISSED OPPORTUNITIES, AND LEARNING

After the four-week bible study ended, I gave the participants a packet with a questionnaire. It was the same set of questions that they had to answer before the bible study began. By having them answer the questions, I was able to gauge the understanding that they had gained through the bible study. Also, during the in-site visit the participants got a chance to tell me what was good about the bible study.

The participants in the bible study were faithful in their commitment and involvement. They gave me a score of “excellent” on theological and biblical soundness and on focused and understandable realistic goals. They loved the timely presentations every week and there was no gap for people to be left behind or lose the momentum. They believed that the project involved the ministry context and addressed effectively what was happening in the country and their part of the neighborhood. It spoke volumes about the situation Centenary and churches like Centenary are facing in needing to address the needs in the community. People understood what was expected of them. And they were kept up to date about the next week’s readings. Every participant was positive and felt that they learned a lot about the immigrant situation. I introduced the project to the church council and the congregation. The work needs to be done in cooperation with the church council and the congregation so we can all be on the same page.

I hope I will have more time to work with the bible study participants to introduce them to hands-on ministry that works with people who are hurting. I may be taking them to a workshop by First Friends of NJ & NY. We may visit churches that host people who are immigrant detainees when they are released into the society or we may host volunteers who work with immigrants so the bible study participants can talk to them and ask questions.

I did this research at a critical time in our nation's history with unsurmountable obstacles of polarization around the issue of immigration. There is rising danger that is resurfacing deeply rooted selfish and self-centered individualism that glorifies white nationalism and white power. The policies of this administration undermine the hard work done by our ancestors to rid this nation of racial prejudice and bigotry, and to create equality for all. I was doing research in a time when courage is the crucial virtue needed in leadership to stand against the demonization and humiliation of justice. In the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr:

The church must be reminded that it is not the master or servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state. If the church does not recapture its prophetic zeal, it will become an irrelevant social club without moral or spiritual authority.³³

The church needs to be a voice of reason and reject the xenophobic nationalism.

³³ Martin Luther King, Jr. "A Knock at Midnight," (11 June, 1967; Mt. Zion Baptist Church Cincinnati: Creed Records), accessed March 14, 2019, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/knock-midnight>.

Preaching and teaching are useful resources that I need in order to continue to influence my congregation with a progressive theology of inclusiveness and understanding.

Lessons Learned

I gained many insights from the one-on-one interviews. I learned through the ministry of Rev. Sharon some ideas of how to innovate in meeting the needs new immigrants. This includes having a visionary plan that acknowledges changes in demographics and providing services. Through Rev. Coblenz I learned to appreciate our biology. Rev. Coblenz talked about the reptilian complex that human brains possess. It is the capacity to be territorial and aggressive. To maintain borders and live in those close-knit circles of friendship and fellowship. As more and more people migrate there is more chance of us having new neighbors. In this complex world we need to overcome this reptilian complex with spiritual discernment and love for the neighbor. We need to learn to form bonds with people we don't know and make new friendships and circles of trust.

My research helped me to see the voiceless undocumented immigrants and how churches are struggling to become a sanctuary for those who are fleeing ICE. I learned from Rev. Karmann how to persuade church members to assist. He educated the congregation with data in order to inspire them and transform their hearts. President Barack Obama in his farewell speech to the nation said these eloquent words,

Hearts must change. If our democracy is to work in this increasingly diverse nation, each one of us must try to heed the advice of one of the great characters in American fiction, Atticus Finch, who said, "You never really understand a person

until you consider things from his point of view...until you climb into his skin and walk around in it." ³⁴

I learned from the bible studies as well. I learned that I had to research the best possible work so I can maximize the impact on bible study participants. Congregations require trust and a safe space where underlying prejudices and biases can be discussed without rebuke and reprimand. I am not so sure if I can create this for the entire church. But I was happy to create this border space—a place where healthy conversations can take place to bring healing and hope in this bible study group.

I believe I learnt from my interactions with multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-racial churches that a global brand of church culture and tradition has to be encouraged in church today if it wants to survive in this globalized world.

Strategies for Change

Here are a few strategies that congregations like Centenary can use to engage the paradigm shift of mission and ministry with respect to immigration.

1. Help Congregations Develop an Appreciation for Diversity

As America is grappling with its identity, the American church is grappling with identity issues as well. The understanding of “us” against “them” is not going to work. We need to overcome our tribalism and territorially aggressive behavior with

³⁴ Barack Obama, "Read the Full Transcript of President Barack Obama's Farewell Speech," *Time Magazine* (Jan, 11, 2017), <http://time.com/4631007/president-obama-farewell-speech-transcript/>.

understanding, love, and justice for all God's people. The American understanding of manifest destiny that depicted the American dream of being a chosen and exclusive people of God must give way and reconnect the sacrificial giving of the crucified Christ.

Tolerance may mean quietly putting up with difference, perhaps in the silent hope that it eventually will go away. But appreciation for diversity is rooted in respect which means coming to see the cultural difference of the other as having intrinsic value, not as deviation from some norm or a failure to reach a certain level. Each human being is made in God's image and likeness (Gen1:26). That image and likeness confers a divinely decreed dignity, worth, and God given equality to all of us as children of the one God who is the creator of all things. There needs to be systematic effort in assessing every aspect of congregational life from leadership recruitment and hiring, to worship resources and the types of images present in the building. The body of Christ is where human divisions of race, gender, and class need to be overcome. When we fail to overcome them, we perpetuate them and fail in our vocation to the world to proclaim and live the reconciling gospel.

2. Help Congregations Develop a Global Identity

The idea of monoculture is imprinted in our minds, hearts, and theology. We need to help our congregations see not only diversity in positive light but help them to think globally. The presumption is that what happens in some part of the world has no significance to me here and it does not affect me. But in fact we are connected in more ways than we know. Globalization is making the world smaller as we become more connected to each other through technology and other developments. A vision of

diversity and global citizenship needs to be encouraged in our congregations through preaching, teaching, and interactions. A global perspective of Christianity is not about world domination but global understanding, harmony, and good will for all people in the world. It is a global theology invested in bringing survival and good to all and not just the rich few. It is totally opposite to the paradigm of survival of the fittest and is rooted in loving your global neighbor. Global identity exemplifies servanthood and leadership that is rooted in love and compassion for all of God's people. Life in community is a spiritual thing that needs to be embodied in our practical day to encounters through dialogue and conversations. We need to follow the marks of neighborliness that are defined by Jesus himself in the parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus is the compassionate one who stops exploitation and helps those who are weak and need help.

Migration is a global phenomenon. Immigration is not just an American problem. To take the example of Bangladesh: according to one source, more than 700,000 ethnic Rohingya have fled from Myanmar to Bangladesh since 2017. These refugees are part of a persecuted minority.³⁵ Being an Indian American, I know the economic poverty and hardships people of Bangladesh have endured over the years.

3. Help Congregations Develop Intercultural Competency Skills

Church leaders need to teach congregations intercultural competency skills, which are knowledge, attributes, behaviors, and attitudes necessary for successful interaction

³⁵ "The Rohingya Refugee Crisis, Doctors without Borders - USA," accessed March 14, 2019. <https://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/rohingya-refugee-crisis>.

with people from different cultures. Intercultural competence is behavior that promotes shared understanding between people with different values, experiences, and perspectives. Through language classes Rev. Sharon is providing his congregation an avenue to interact with people from different cultures and help them to understand the needs of immigrants in their community. He is also providing a place to have interfaith dialogue among people.

In the future, I could do a bible study that focuses on the beautiful and intimate relationship of food, faith, and culture. This might help my congregation to make room for other cultures and traditions to co-exist. I would like to introduce them to foods and cultural diversity from different parts of the world and encourage them to have meaningful and open dialogues to understand each other, learn, and accept into the community of faith. This would create avenues for new appreciation of culture, customs, and language in a playful and fun way. Many churches have found out that their roast beef dinners or fish and chip dinners or Mardi-Gras festival have not been successful in the recent years in the church communities. Neighborhoods are changing and bringing new people in. People in Africa or India don't eat roast. Help participants have a hands-on experience of connecting and understanding each other culturally.

4. Recognize the Intersectionality of Race, Gender, Economic Status and Geography

Intersectionality acknowledges that race, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, education, citizenship status, and your geographic location all interact with one another. There are some shared experiences, to be sure, but not enough to say, "They are all alike." Statements and thinking like this alienate people and minimizes their diverse

experiences. Intersectionality demonstrates how the politics of self are crucial to self-perception and self-imagining. Race is a human construct that alienates people of color. When asked specifically about racial prejudice, all the bible study participants and the religious leaders said that it is because of ignorance and not really knowing the other person well enough.

In my interview with Rev. Coblenz, he casually mentioned that because he is a white heterosexual male who is highly educated, he could get away with stuff which was far more outrageous in comparison to his Indian predecessor. I thought about white heterosexual male privilege that also intersects with the issue of immigration in the local church context. Immigrants are far more open to challenge themselves in thinking and understanding encouraged by a white heterosexual male as compared to a person of color or a woman. They would prefer to listen to a white heterosexual male even more so than their own kind. This web of institutional and cultural preferential treatment is called white privilege. Scholarly work can attest to the fact that race and ethnicity in colonized community seldom discusses this inflection of racial privilege with gender, an extremely important intersection that nuances the structure of minority identity in the country. People of color must constantly prove themselves.³⁶ Patriarchy and ensuing male privilege mean that while immigrant men are discriminated against for being immigrant, they are also treated better than immigrant women, both by the majority American

³⁶ Miguel De La Torre, "Doing Latina/o Ethics from the Margins of Empire: Liberating the Colonized Mind," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 33 no. 2 (2013): 5.

community and within the American immigrant community. Immigrant women are still restricted in their movements and their lives, expected to be both the modern worker and the traditional housewife. I reflected upon my own identity as Asian Indian women clergy how it affects my leadership and status within the local church. I do find myself at the very bottom of the totem pole.

American immigration policy has been unjust and very difficult. It is unjustly stacked against people of color, who are poor, uneducated or poorly educated with not much money and hailing from third world countries. People from European countries emigrate to United States with little or no opposition. Since 9/11 there is widespread Islamophobia underlying the concern for safety and security of the American people. There is another widely known thought that is being perpetuated among Americans that immigrants are taking away what is rightfully ours. The middle America and the poor classes of people are worried about making ends meet and developing a soft side for immigrant issues is hard. The church in America is the frontlines of where this battle to survive is fought.

Intersectionality provides the foundational principle that challenges “whiteness” or the “white experience” of Western imagination as decentralized, not normative. It is only through intersectionality that we realize that who we are is never a pre-given reality, but constructed and filtered through race, gender, class, geographic location, and many more filters. The church needs to understand this intersectionality as it engages with people from different cultures, backgrounds and worship styles. Mission and ministry

should reflect this principle of intersectionality in the life of the church and its congregation.

5. Listen to Deep Stories

Deep story is a personal story of someone's life. It is their perspective. The listener is called to understand this deep story through the eyes of the storyteller without casting any judgement. Arlie Russell Hochschild in her book talks about the deep story of the south from the perspective of people on the far-right:

A deep story is a feels-as-if story—it's the story feelings tell, in the language of symbols. It removes judgment. It removes fact. It tells us how things feel. Such a story permits those on both sides of the political spectrum to stand back and explore the subjective prism through which the party on the other side sees the world. And I don't believe we understand anyone's politics, right or left, without it. For we all have a deep story.³⁷

In reading Hochschild's book I learned about the most important and valuable technique that a courageous leader needs to possess: being an emotionally intelligent leader. In these uncertain and highly polarizing time you need people who have their emotional stuff together. Emotionally intelligent leaders are good listeners because they take their cues from their conversations and interactions with people. A leader needs to stay in the conversation and relationship to be faithful to the process of listening. The

³⁷ Arlie Russell Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right* (New York: New Press, 2016), 135.

opposite position or opposing view may seem so far against your line of thought or understanding and sometimes outright vile, but still hanging in the conversation and making people feel they are heard is first rule of healthy listening practice.

Trust is a major component in helping the congregation to engage in a process of reflection and deep thinking. This kind of work needs a great depth of trust and level of comfort that needs to be achieved within the community of faith by the leader. Cross-cultural ministry is deeply contextual. So, it's important to not try to replicate what someone else is doing, but rather discover what works in your setting. Every setting is different and unique. It's an ongoing process of figuring it out as you go along. But sharing ideas, stories, and resources can provide help and inspiration.

Final Thoughts: Missional Imagination

In light of our emerging context, mission and ministry need to change. For mission imagination to be birthed in our life and community, we need to make time and commitment to becoming a learning community of faith. We must be equipped with resources that challenge us and move us to new missional horizons. The innovation of mission-shaped life in a church needs to involve a broad-cross section of the church if it is to actually enter the congregation's DNA. In addition, churches need to collaborate and confront systemic oppression. I plan to collaborate with the religious leaders in my community and to ignite passion to do mission and ministry with immigrants.

We all live with hidden biases, which we may not want to face because we benefit from systems of oppression. But having a missional imagination involves facing these biases. As Parker Palmer writes,

Grant me the wisdom to see my own unconscious biases that continue to unintentionally and inadvertently make me complicit in this staggering rise of hate and callousness. May I never forget that hate and callousness have been as much part of this American experiment as joy, hope, and love. That while this experience may be new to my consciousness it has been a part of the lives of my fellow Americans who have lacked the access to money and power that come with privilege.³⁸

I believe the church needs to be invested in the politics of our nation to reject powers that threaten democracy, racial equality, and justice for all, especially for the weak and vulnerable. The church needs to stand up for the poor and the immigrant against the anti-immigrant policies of the Trump government. In these challenging times the church needs to tap the wellspring of love and compassion of the Holy Spirit to draw forth fresh missional waters to be shared with their communities.

This work has humbled me in ways I never thought it could. I need to build more trust and relationships to further this work in the community. I am grateful for Centenary United Methodist Church and the bible study participants who worked with me to encourage me and endure with me as I did my research work. God is not done with Centenary; we have work to do. I greatly appreciate the religious leaders who took their

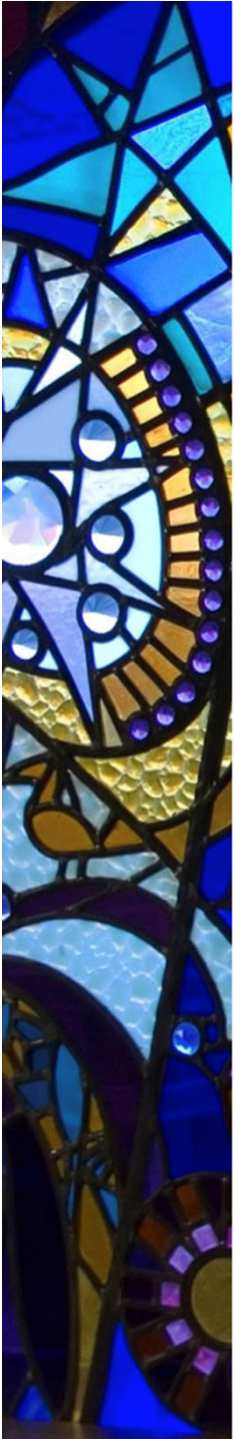
³⁸ Parker J. Palmer, "Owning up to My Toxic Biases," *www.onbeing.org*, (October 17, 2017), <https://onbeing.org/blog/parker-palmer-owning-up-to-my-toxic-biases/>.

valuable time and commitment to the interview process. I appreciate the wisdom and exceptional leadership that they continue to demonstrate in this challenging and crucial work.

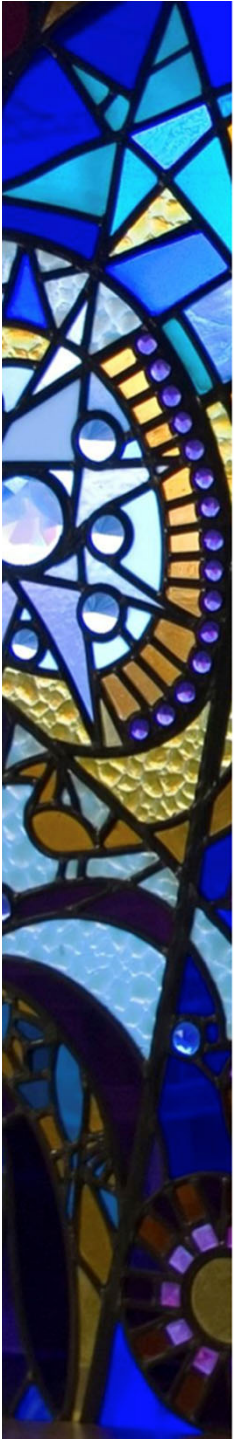


Strangers Next Door

Changing Demographics, Identity & Attitude



Welcome all the participants in the room and explain that each session will start with a time of silence in which participants are asked to offer silent prayers. A candle is lit to signify God's presence with us. Water is poured in the basin to signify the baptismal rite in which water is the symbol of Christ's holy spirit that anoints believers.



**Singing the song
“Welcome” from the
W&S book (vs. 1&2)**

Welcome

3152

Laurie Zelman and Mark A. Miller

**1. Let's walk together
for a while
and ask where we begin
to build a world
where love can grow
and hope can enter in,**

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**to be the hands of healing
and to plant the seed of peace,**




Refrain:

**Singing welcome,
welcome to this place.**

**You're invited
to come and know God's grace.**

A warm, golden sunset or sunrise over a misty landscape. The sky is a deep orange and yellow, with soft light filtering through the trees. The foreground shows several evergreen trees and a body of water, all bathed in the same warm, golden light. The overall mood is peaceful and welcoming.

**All are welcome
the love of God to share
'cause all of us are
welcome here;
all are welcome in this place.**



**2. Let's talk together of a time
when we will share a feast,
where pride and power
kneel to serve
the lonely and the least,**




**and joy will set the table
as we join our hands to pray,**

A scenic landscape with a golden sunset or sunrise over a field of trees. The sky is a warm, glowing yellow-orange, and the trees are silhouetted against the light. The foreground shows a field with several trees, including a large evergreen on the left and a smaller one in the center. The overall mood is peaceful and inviting.

Refrain:

**Singing welcome,
welcome to this place.**

**You're invited
to come and know God's grace.**



**All are welcome
the love of God to share
'cause all of us are
welcome here;
all are welcome in this place.**



**3. Let's dream together
of the day
when earth and heaven are one,
a city built of love and light,
the new Jerusalem,**

A misty, golden-hour landscape with evergreen trees and a field. The scene is bathed in a warm, orange glow, suggesting a sunrise or sunset. The foreground shows a field with several evergreen trees, and the background is a dense forest of trees shrouded in mist. The overall mood is serene and hopeful.


**where our mourning
turns to dancing,
every creature lifts its voice!**



Refrain:

**Crying welcome,
welcome to this place.**

**You're invited
to come and know God's grace.**

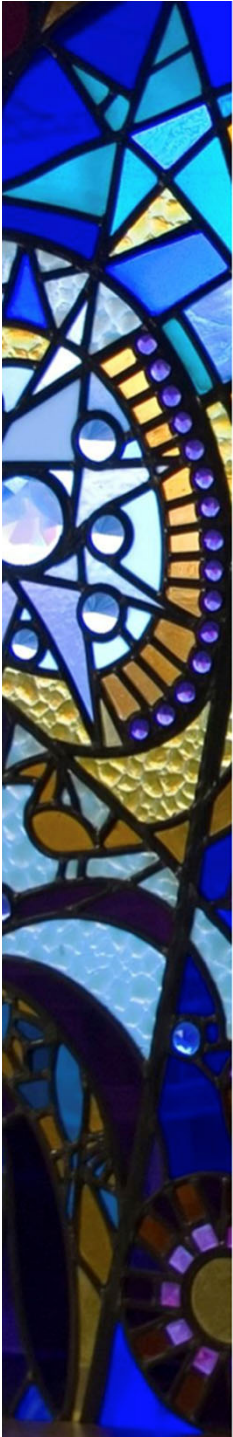
A warm, golden sunset or sunrise over a misty landscape. The sky is a deep orange and yellow, with soft light filtering through a layer of mist or fog. Several evergreen trees are scattered across the foreground and middle ground, their silhouettes softened by the light. The overall mood is peaceful and serene.

**All are welcome
the love of God to share
'cause all of us are
welcome here;
all are welcome in this place.**



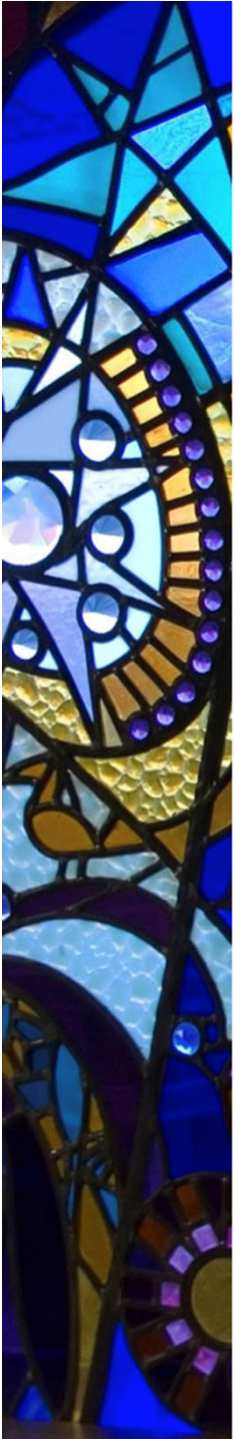
Video clip
About the reading of poem
“ The New Colossus”
by Emma Lazarus

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=InHwqbhPak4>



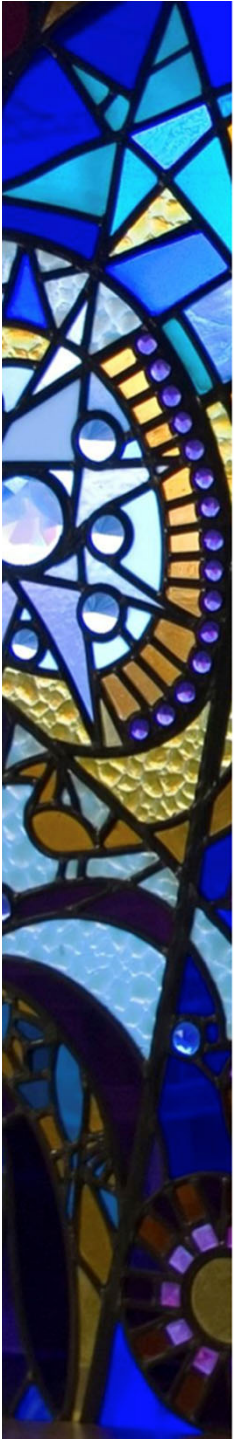
Genesis 1:26-27 (NRSV)

“Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’ So, God created humankind in his image; male and female he created them”.



Exodus 22:21 (NRSV)

21 You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.

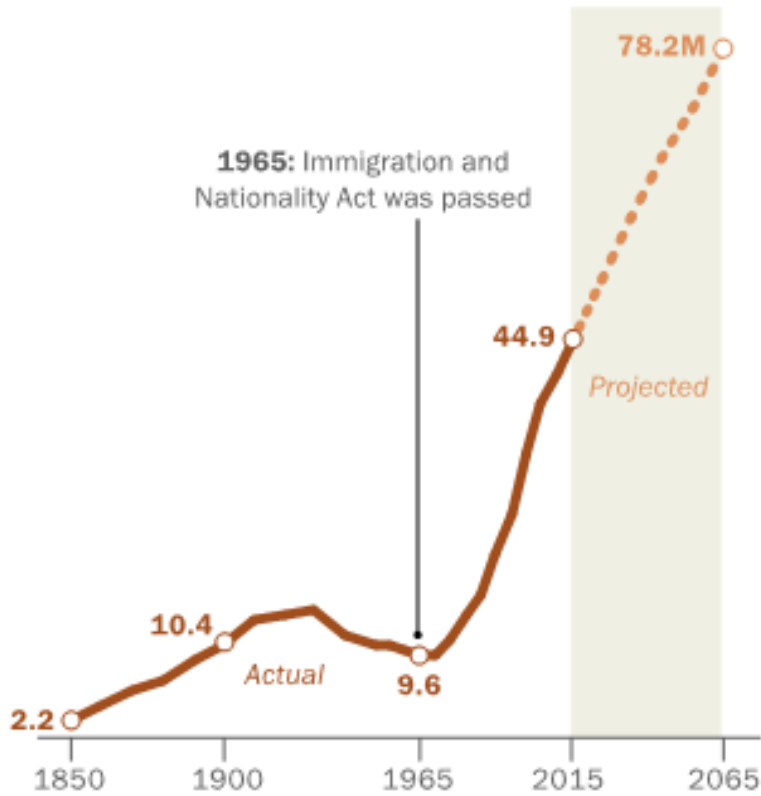


Matthew 25: 35-40 (NRSV)

35 for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ 37 Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? 38 And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? 39 And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ 40 And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family,[a] you did it to me.’



U.S. foreign-born population reached 45 million in 2015, projected to reach 78 million by 2065

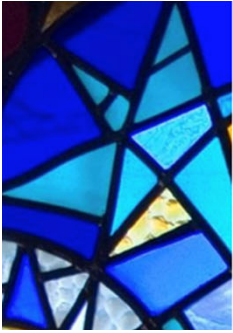


Source: Gibson and Jung (2006) for 1850 to 1890. Edmonston and Passel (1994) estimates for 1900-1955; Pew Research Center estimates for 1960-2015 based on adjusted census data; Pew Research Center projections for 2015-2065.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER



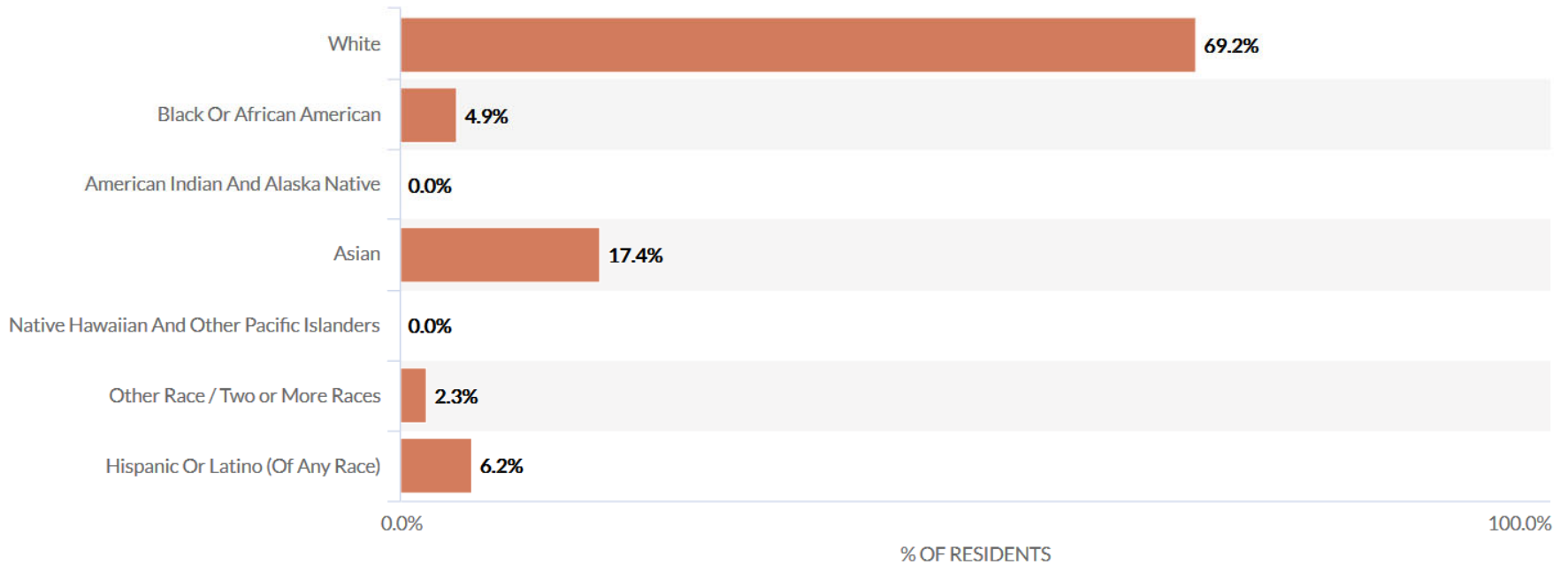
<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/11/30/key-findings-about-u-s-immigrants/>



Demographics of Metuchen

Foreign Born Metuchen Residents: 21.2%

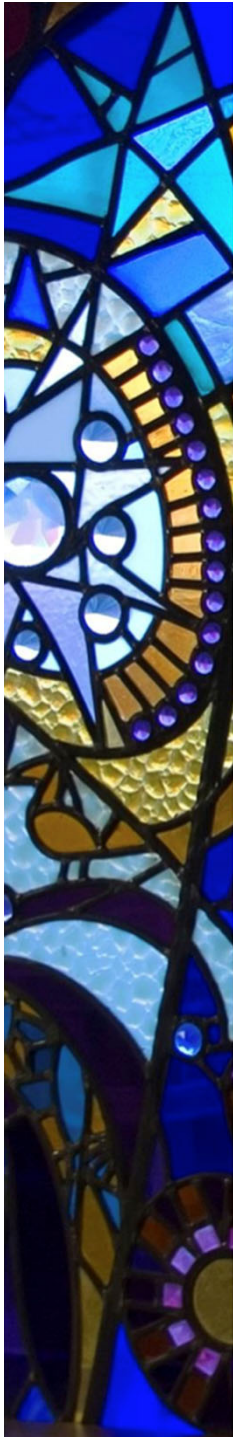
RACE & ETHNIC DIVERSITY



NeighborhoodScout.com

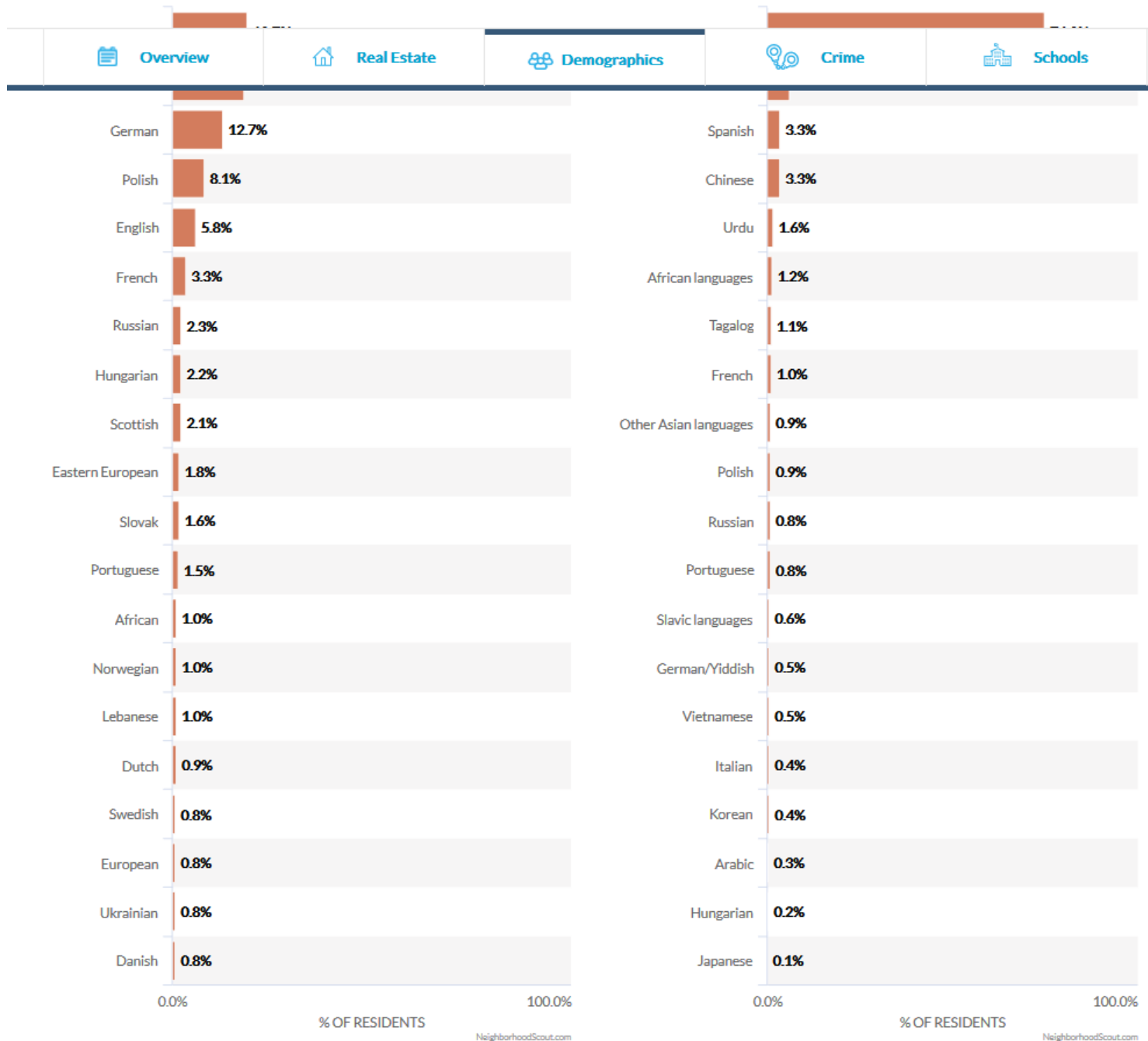


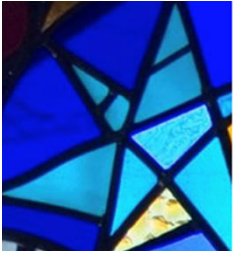
<https://www.neighborhoodscout.com/nj/metuchen/demographics>



ANCESTRY (TOP 20)

LANGUAGES SPOKEN (TOP 20)

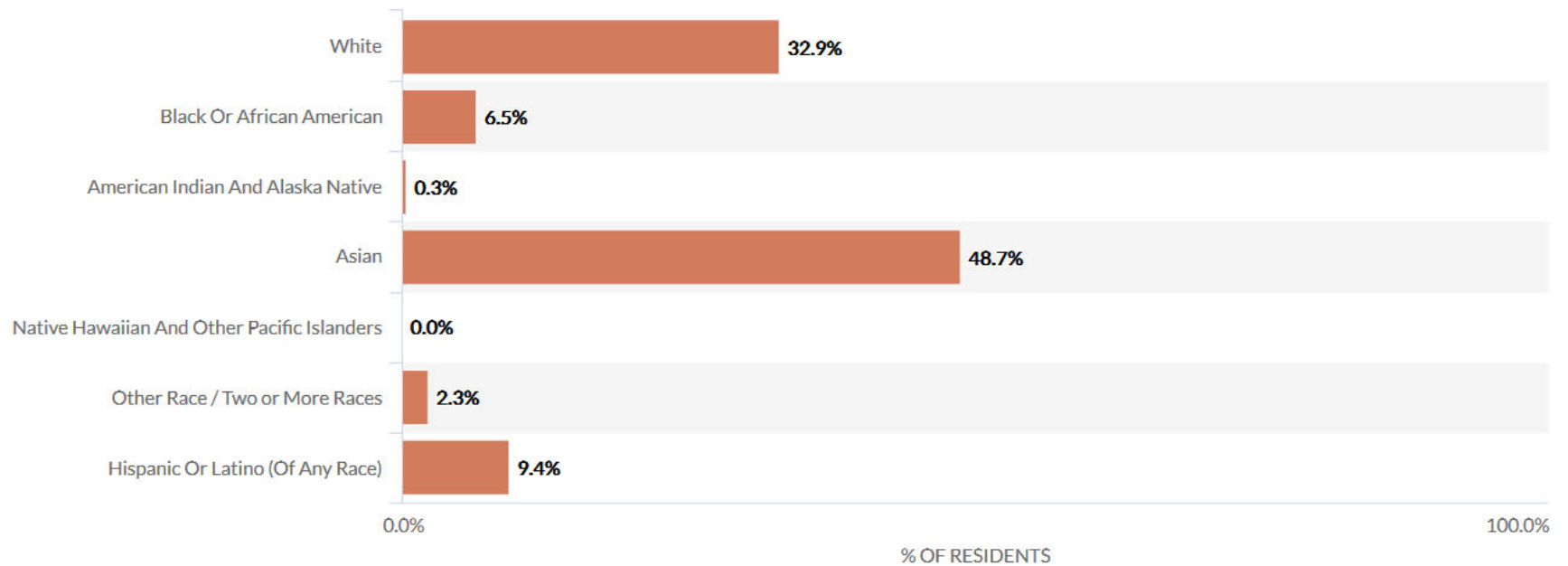




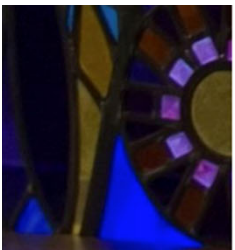
Demographics of Edison

Foreign Born Edison Residents: 45.9%

RACE & ETHNIC DIVERSITY



NeighborhoodScout.com

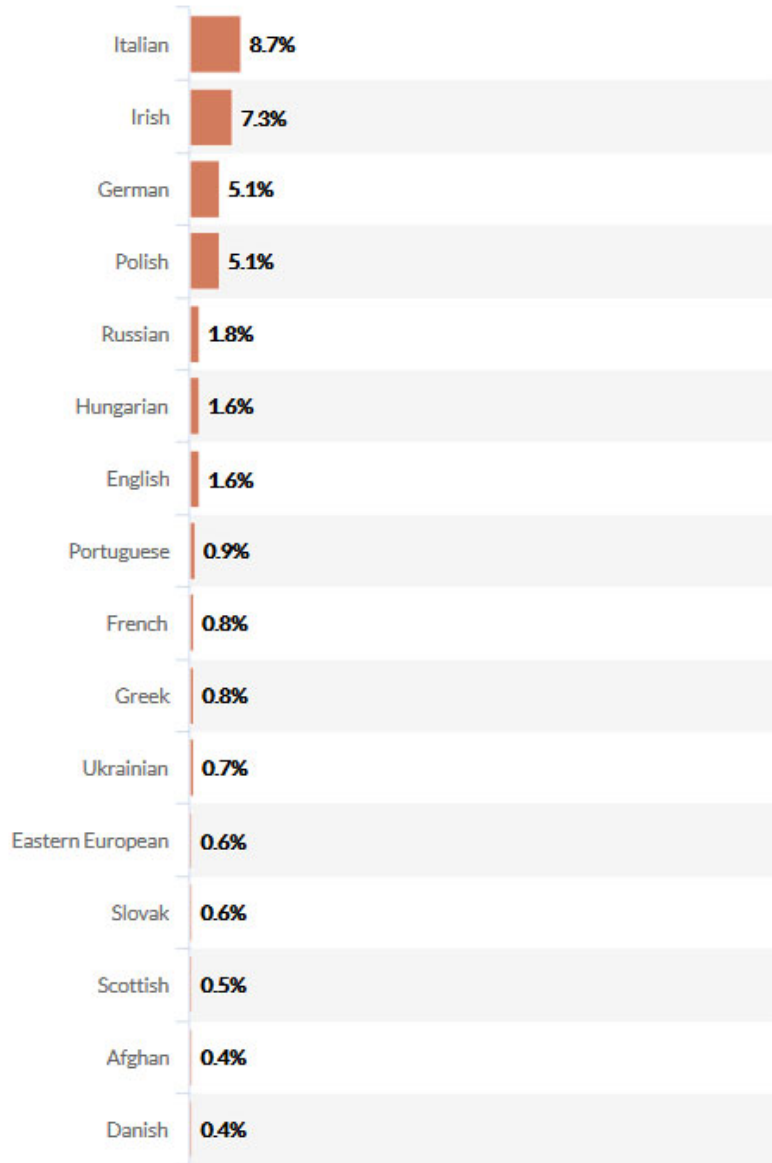


<https://www.neighborhoodscout.com/nj/edison/demographics>

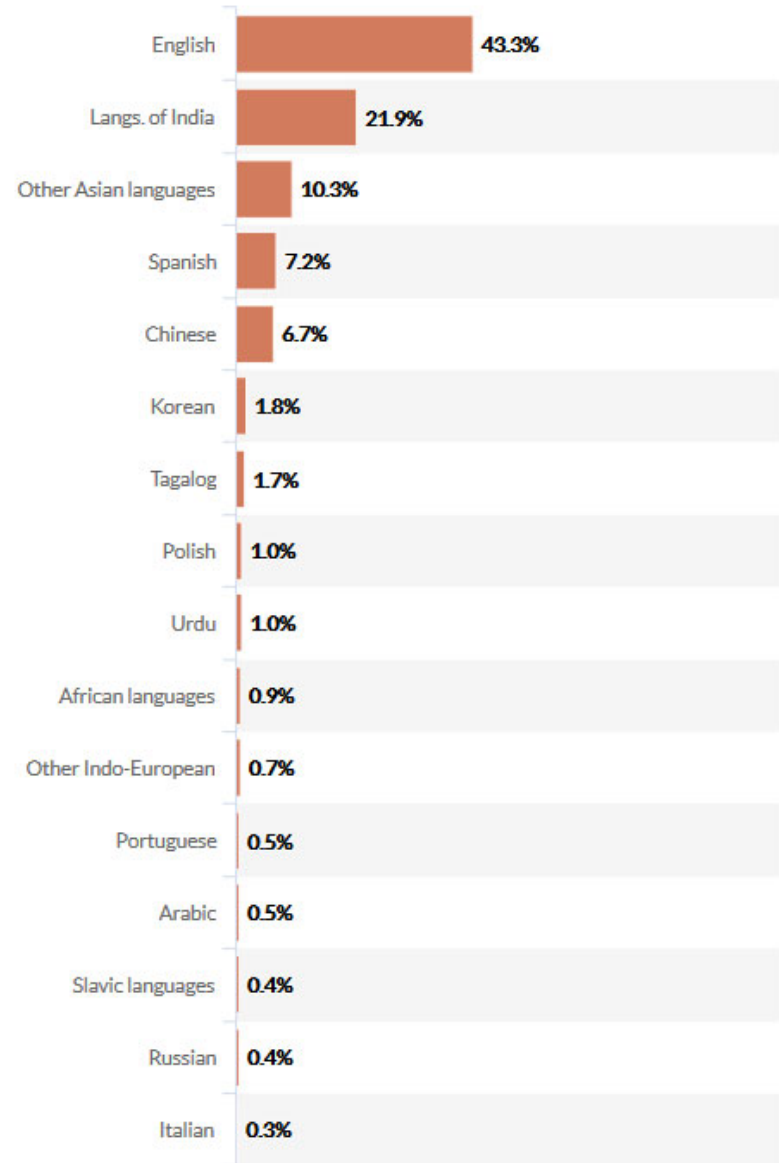
ANCESTRIES & LANGUAGES SPOKEN

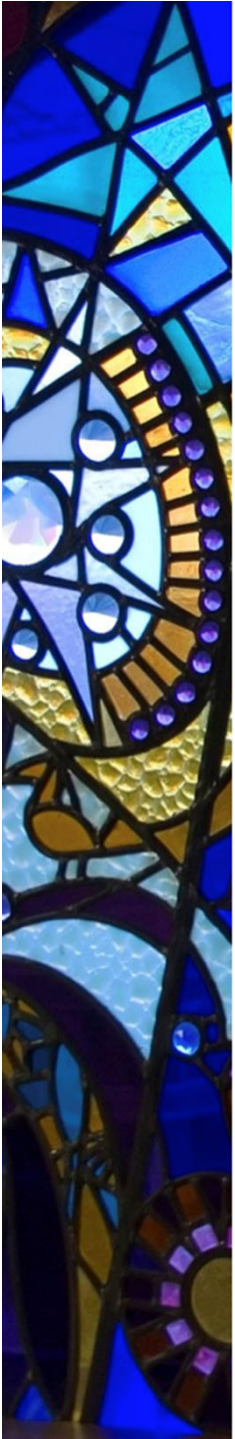


ANCESTRY (TOP 20)



LANGUAGES SPOKEN (TOP 20)





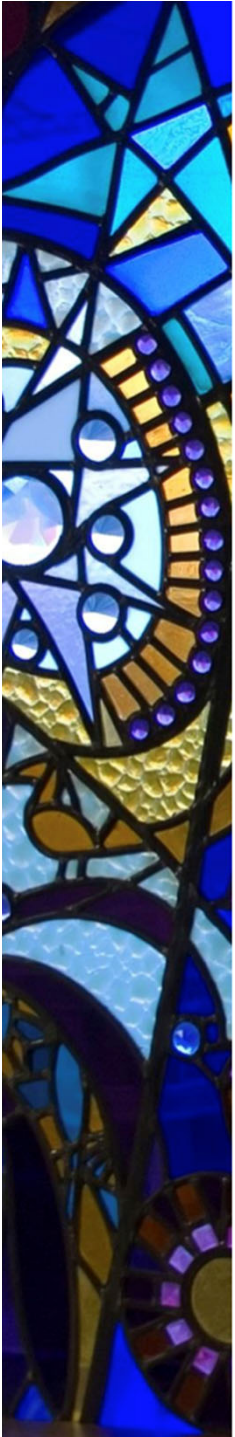
**Participants are asked to read
the article**

- [America's uneasy
'browning,'](#)

Clarence Page, *Chicago
Tribune*, May 23, 2012



1. How are demographics in the United States are changing?
What evidence from the article supports your answer?
Has this been reflected in the 5mile radius of the church?
2. What does the author mean when he says, “America is quietly browning”?
How does this browning relate to immigration?
3. Should Immigrants leave their culture, language and customs when they migrate to America?



4. Has Immigration changed the identity of America as a nation?

5. Where does prejudice and hate comes from?

6. How do we as a church be a place of love and mercy towards strangers in our midst?

7. What should be our response to changing demographics in the 5mile radius of Metuchen and Edison as a disciple of Christ?



Responsive Prayer

Merciful God, we confess we have failed to see the stranger among us.

We have closed our eyes to the injustices that force people to leave their homelands and seek shelter in unfamiliar places. We claim that you are our refuge and security, yet we act as though national borders provide us with our only opportunity for peace.

Forgive us for ignoring your call to peacemaking and for only looking after our own interests.

Help us to recall our personal stories as sojourners in a foreign land so that we may fully embody your call to provide for the orphan, widow, and stranger. Amen.



Migratory God

Bible and Migration



Welcome all the participants in the room and explain that each session will start with a time of silence in which participants are asked to offer silent prayers. A candle is lit to signify God's presence with us. Water is poured in the basin to signify the baptismal rite in which water is the symbol of Christ's holy spirit that anoints believers.



Singing the song
“Draw the Circle Wide”
from the W&S book



Draw the Circle Wide

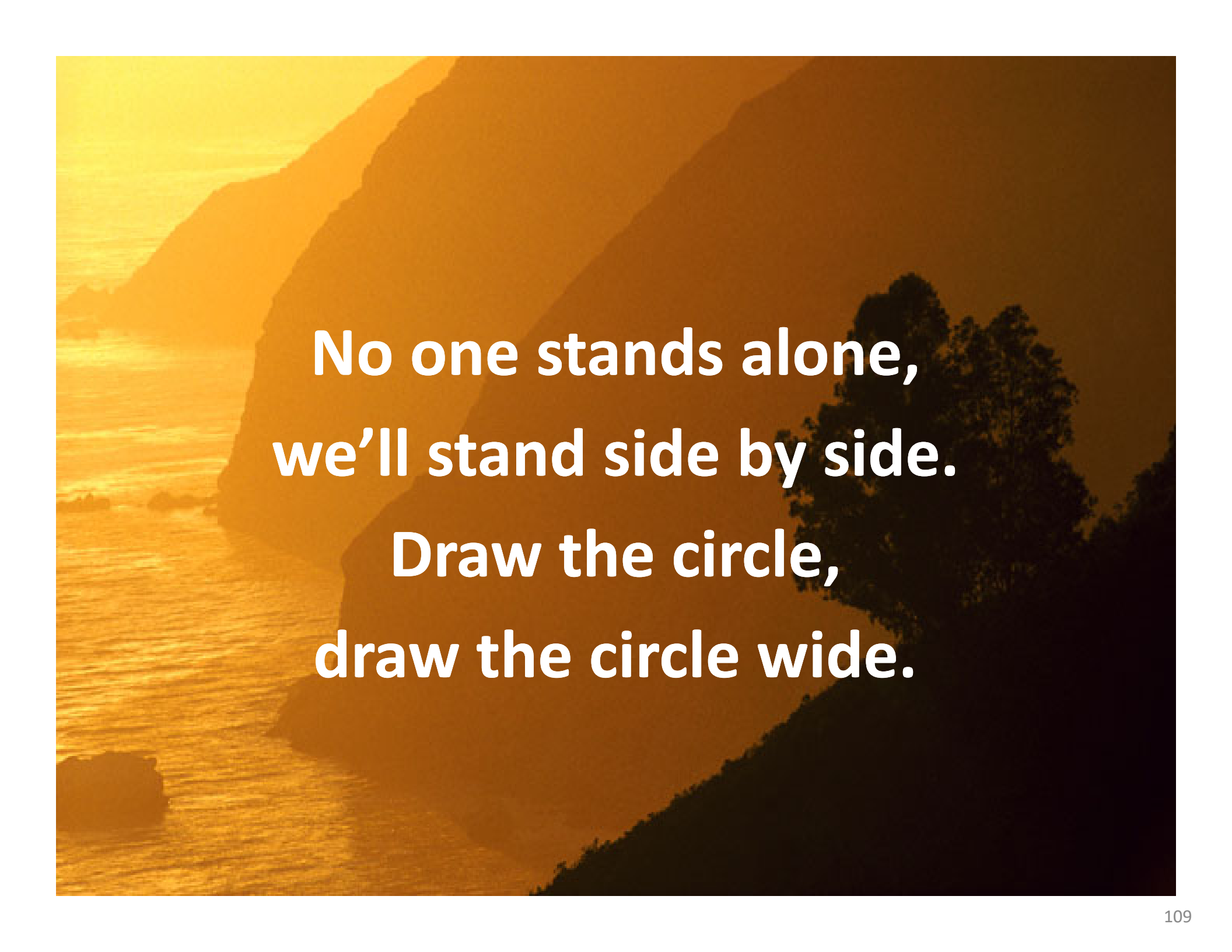
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Gordon Light

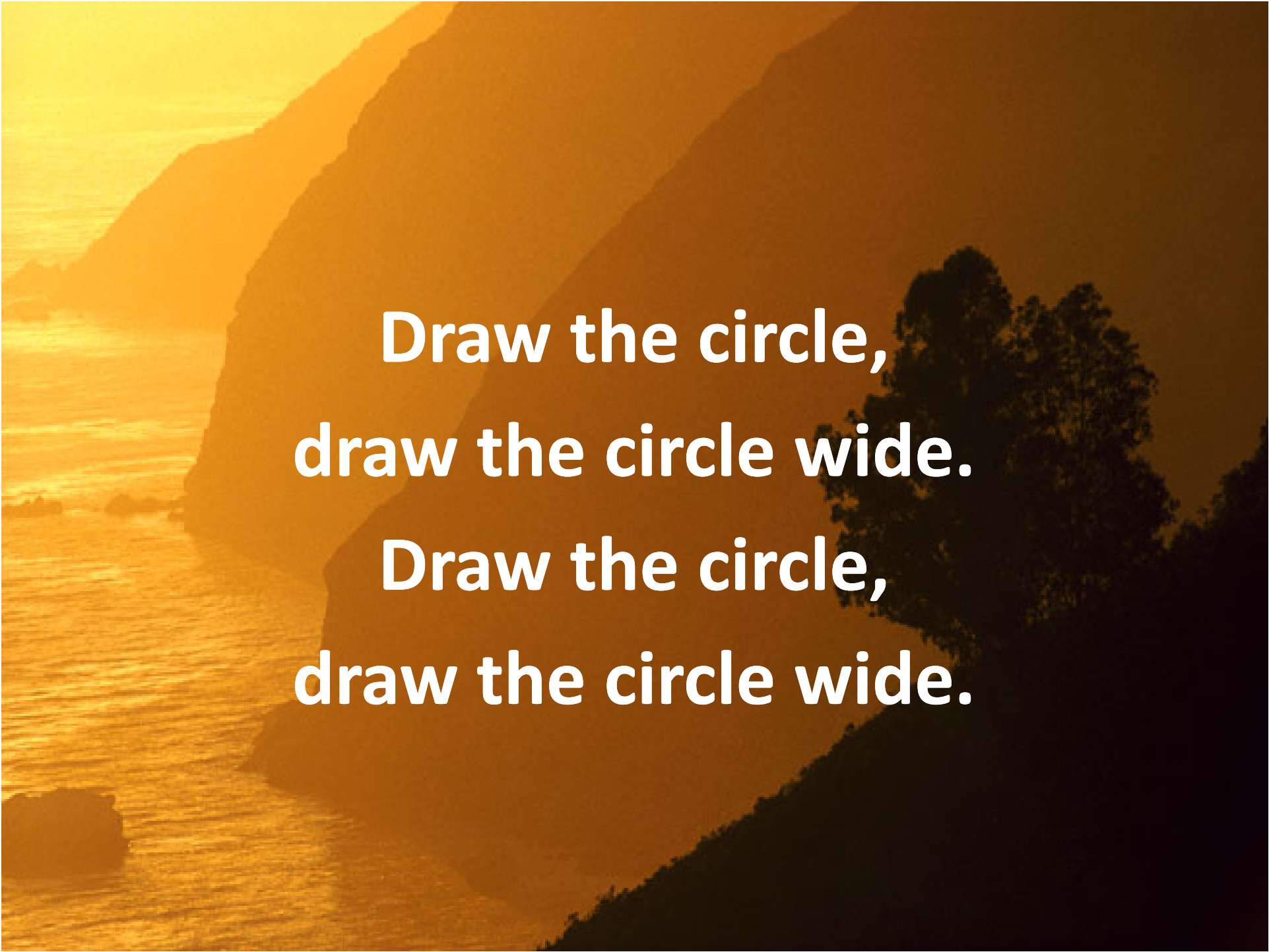
**Draw the circle,
draw the circle wide.**

**Draw the circle,
draw the circle wide.**

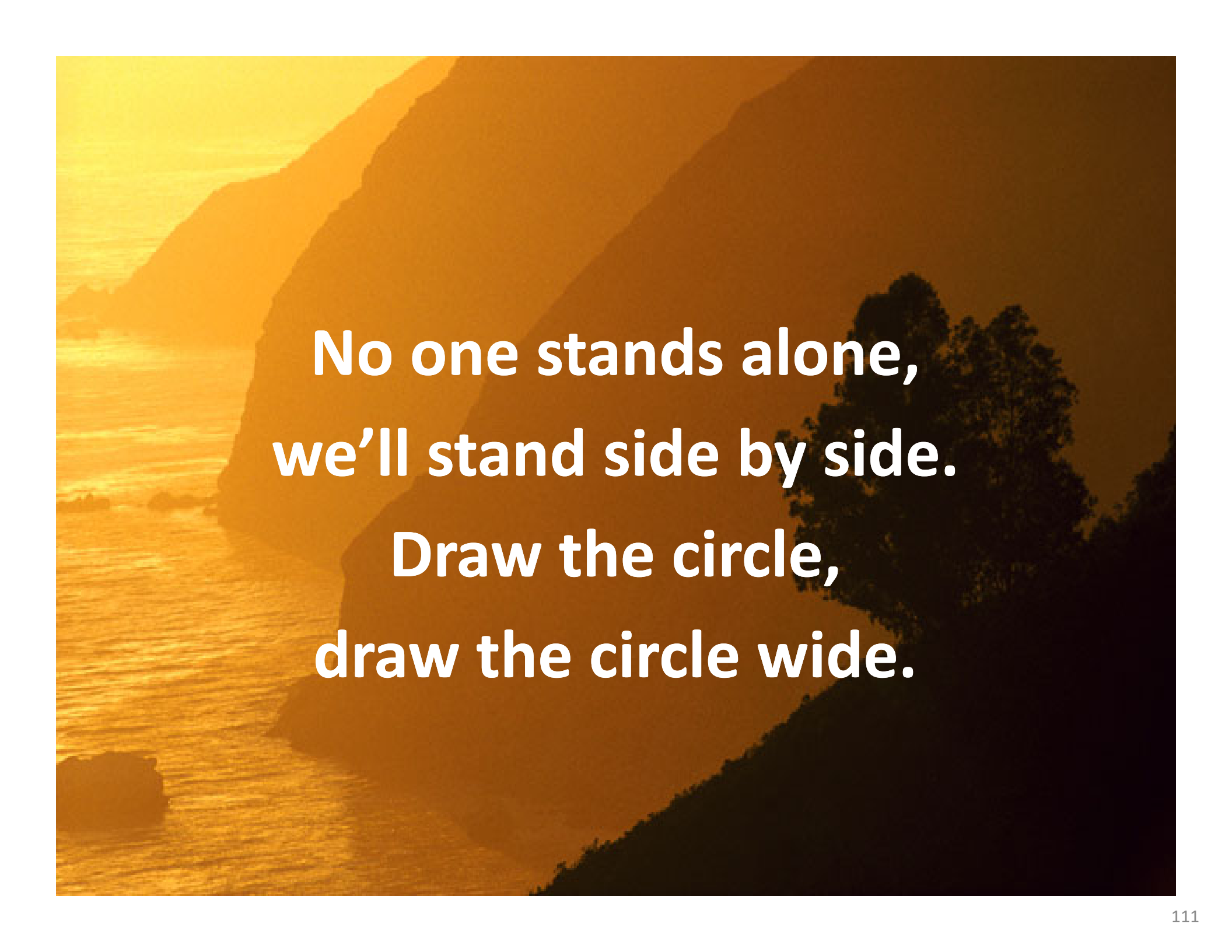
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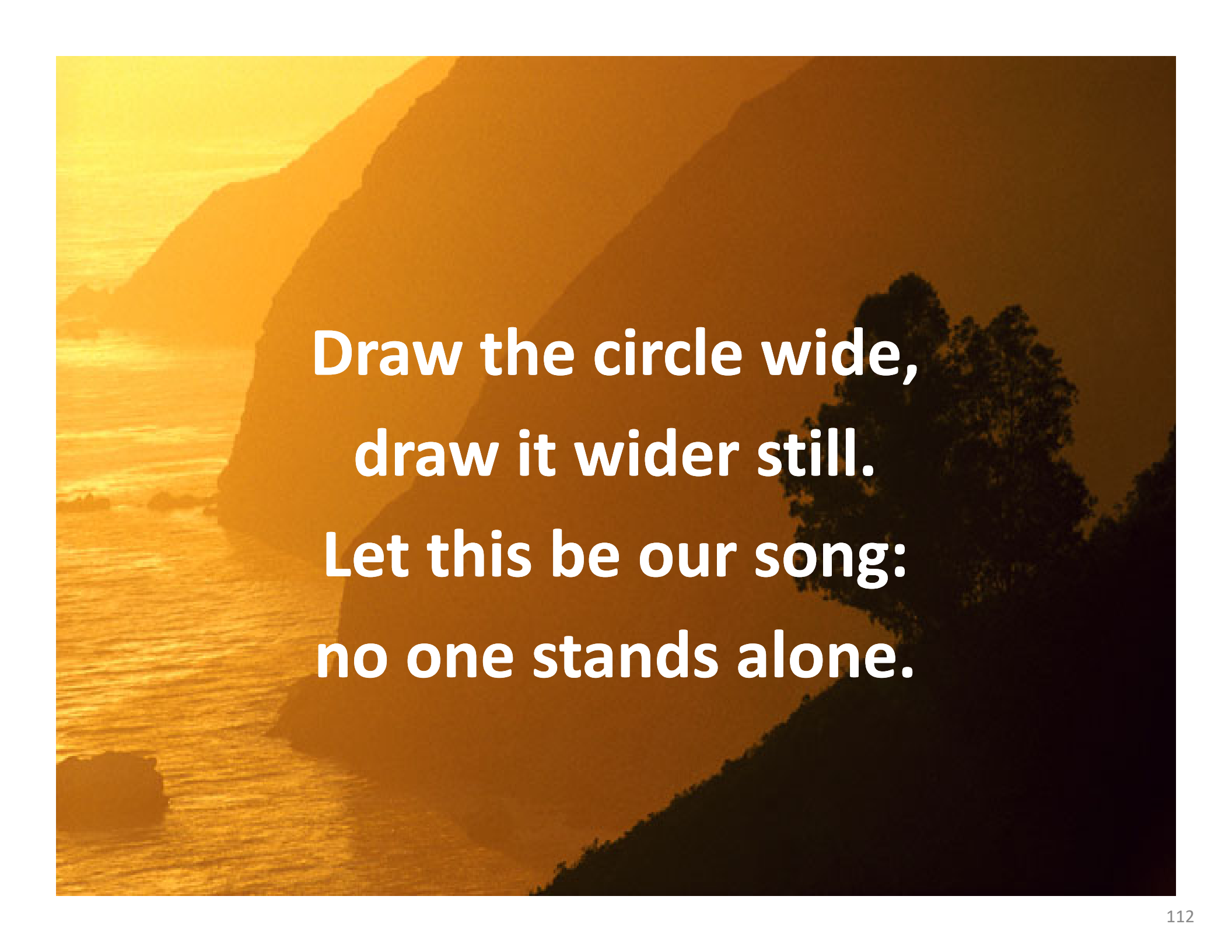
**No one stands alone,
we'll stand side by side.
Draw the circle,
draw the circle wide.**



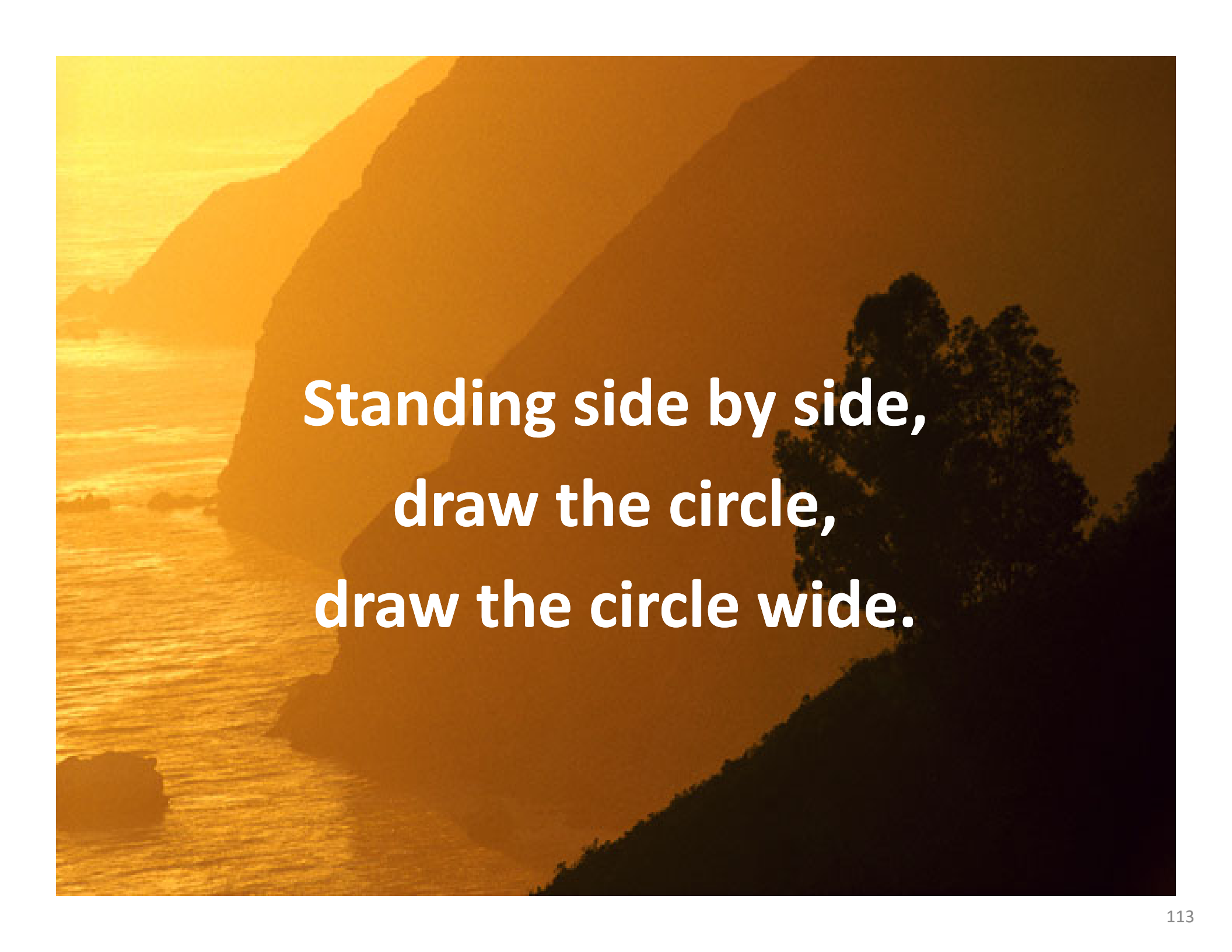
**Draw the circle,
draw the circle wide.
Draw the circle,
draw the circle wide.**



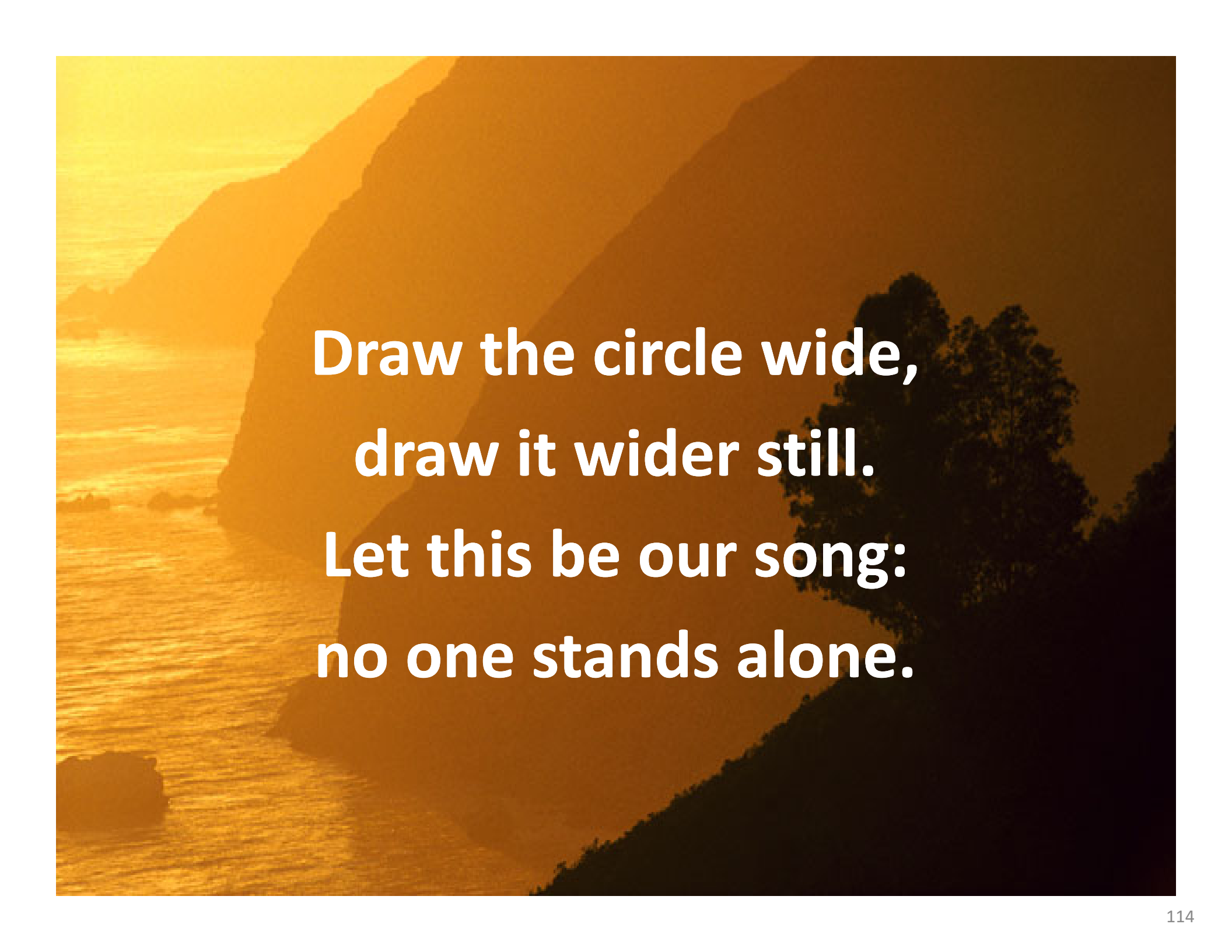
**No one stands alone,
we'll stand side by side.
Draw the circle,
draw the circle wide.**



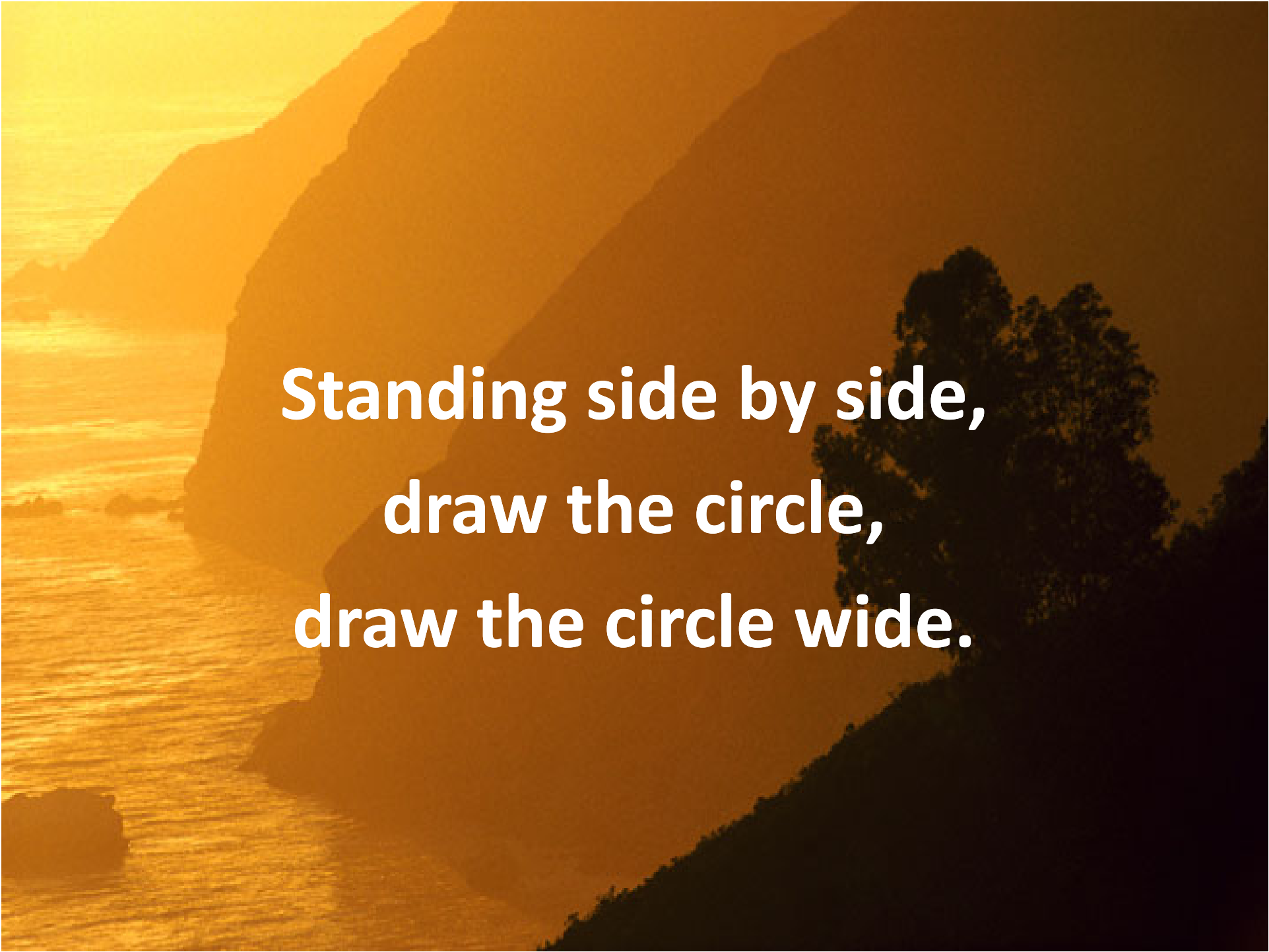
**Draw the circle wide,
draw it wider still.
Let this be our song:
no one stands alone.**



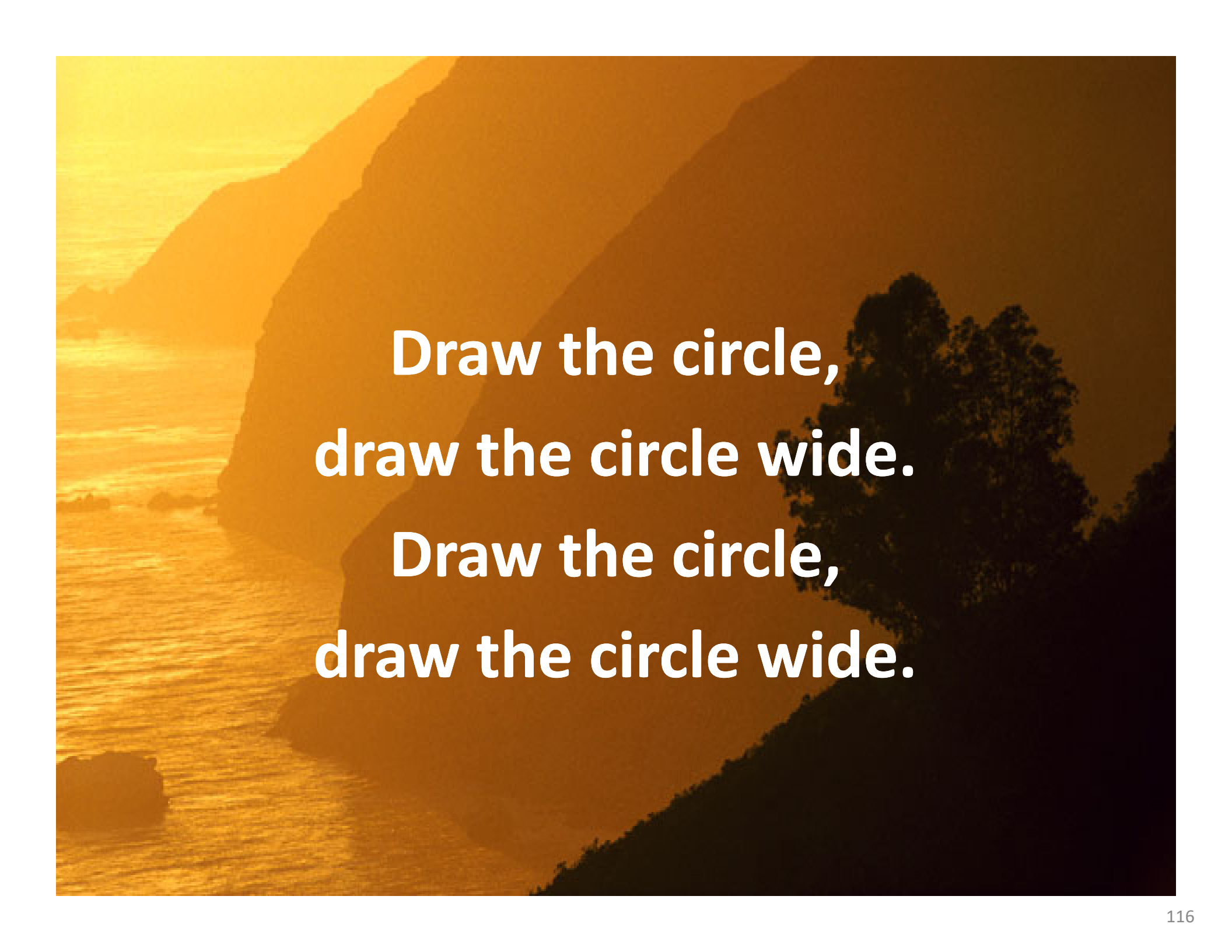
**Standing side by side,
draw the circle,
draw the circle wide.**



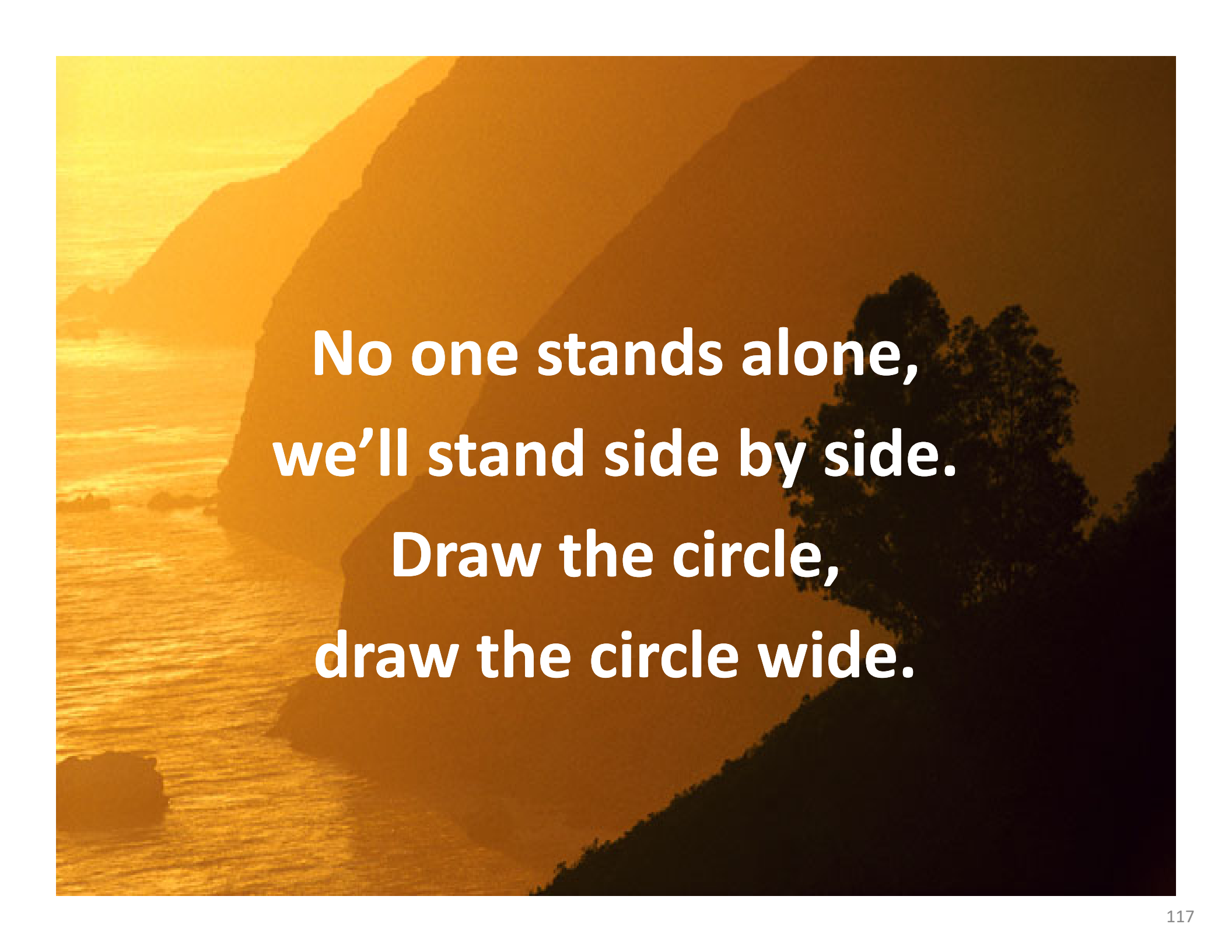
**Draw the circle wide,
draw it wider still.
Let this be our song:
no one stands alone.**

A scenic landscape at sunset or sunrise. The sky is a deep orange, and the water reflects the light. A large, dark cliffside dominates the middle ground, and silhouetted trees are visible in the foreground on the right.

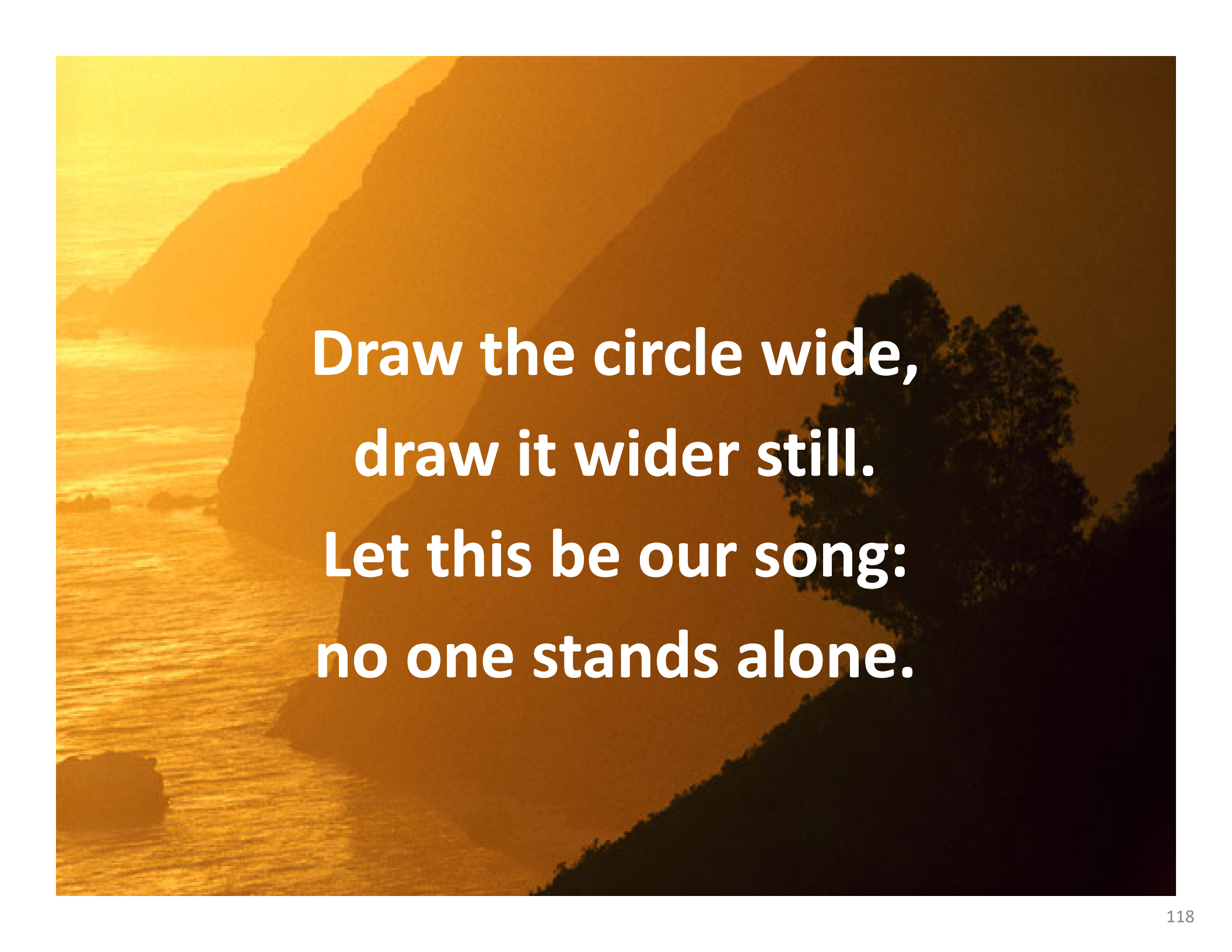
**Standing side by side,
draw the circle,
draw the circle wide.**



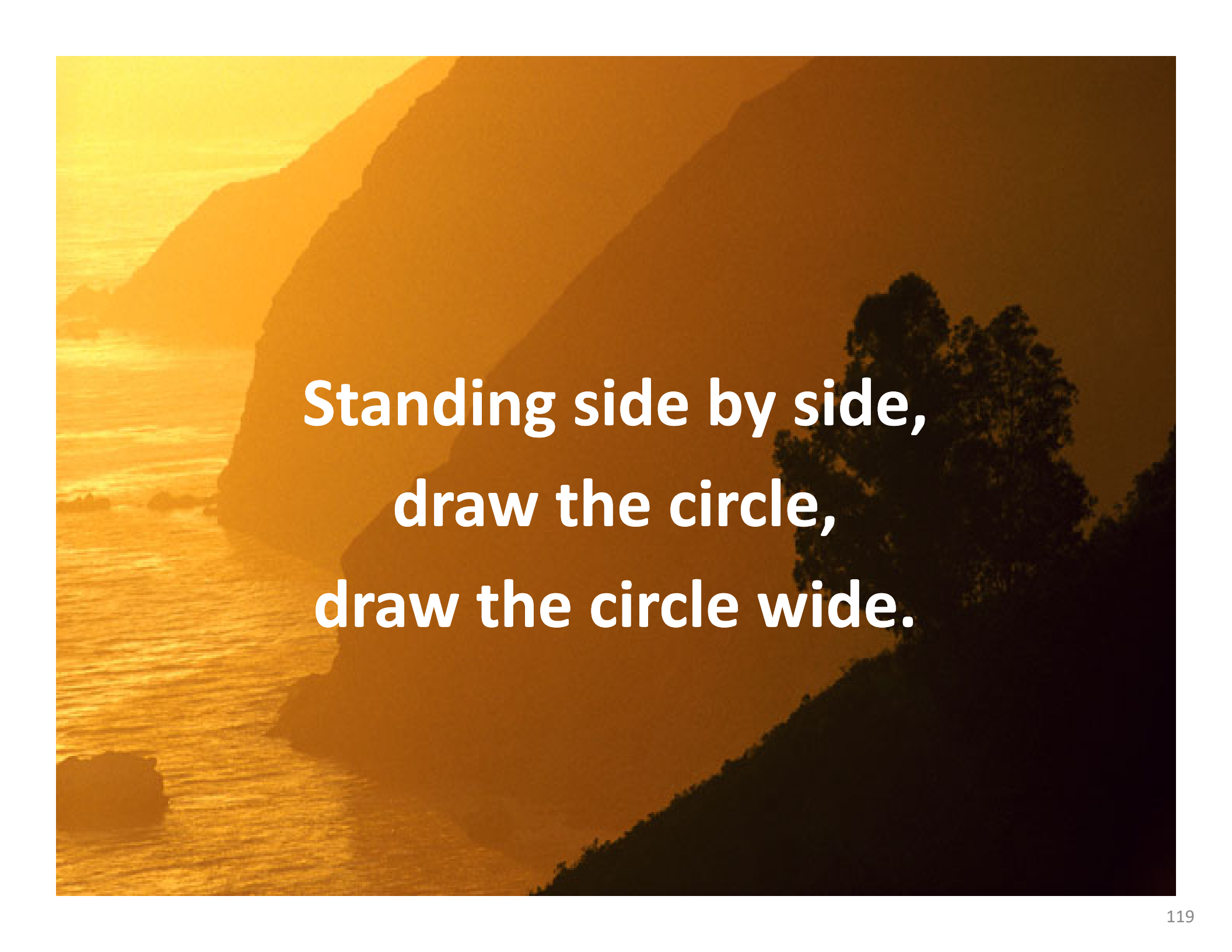
**Draw the circle,
draw the circle wide.
Draw the circle,
draw the circle wide.**



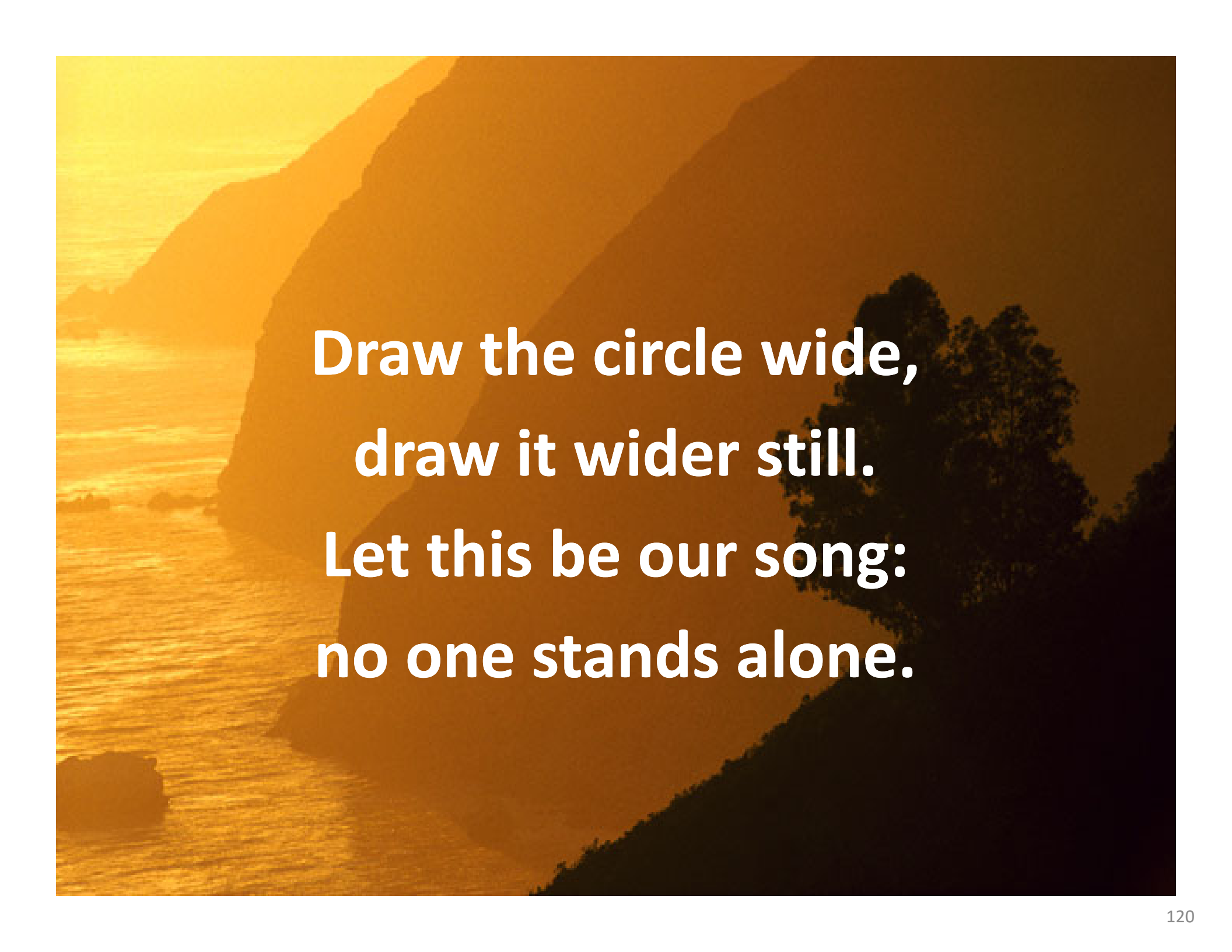
**No one stands alone,
we'll stand side by side.
Draw the circle,
draw the circle wide.**



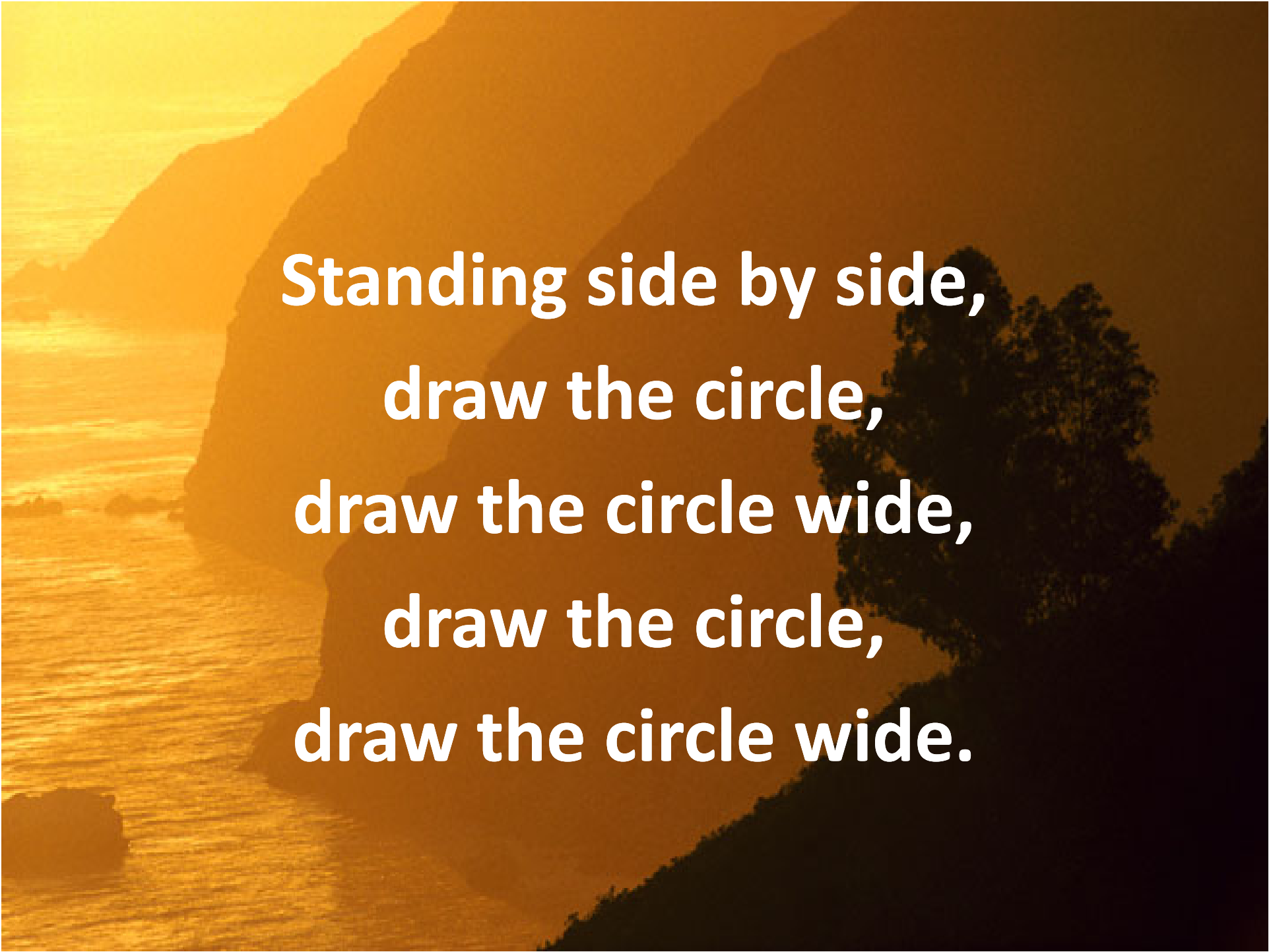
**Draw the circle wide,
draw it wider still.
Let this be our song:
no one stands alone.**



**Standing side by side,
draw the circle,
draw the circle wide.**



**Draw the circle wide,
draw it wider still.
Let this be our song:
no one stands alone.**

A scenic landscape at sunset or sunrise. The sky is a warm, golden yellow, and the water reflects this light. A large, dark rock formation dominates the middle ground, and a silhouette of a tree is visible on the right side. The text is overlaid in the center in a bold, white font.

**Standing side by side,
draw the circle,
draw the circle wide,
draw the circle,
draw the circle wide.**

Welcome

3152

Laurie Zelman and Mark A. Miller

**1. Let's walk together
for a while
and ask where we begin
to build a world
where love can grow
and hope can enter in,**

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**to be the hands of healing
and to plant the seed of peace,**

A scenic landscape with a golden sunset or sunrise over a field of trees. The sky is a warm, hazy orange, and the ground is covered in snow. Several evergreen trees are scattered across the field, and a dense line of trees is visible in the background.


Refrain:

**Singing welcome,
welcome to this place.**

**You're invited
to come and know God's grace.**

A warm, golden-hued landscape with trees and a field, serving as a background for the text. The scene is bathed in a soft, orange glow, suggesting a sunrise or sunset. Several evergreen trees are scattered across the field, and a dense line of trees is visible in the background. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and inviting.

**All are welcome
the love of God to share
'cause all of us are
welcome here;
all are welcome in this place.**



**2. Let's talk together of a time
when we will share a feast,
where pride and power
kneel to serve
the lonely and the least,**




**and joy will set the table
as we join our hands to pray,**

A scenic landscape with a golden sunset or sunrise over a field of trees. The sky is a warm, glowing yellow-orange, and the trees are silhouetted against the light. The foreground shows a field of snow or light-colored ground with several evergreen trees.


Refrain:

**Singing welcome,
welcome to this place.**

**You're invited
to come and know God's grace.**

A warm, golden-hued landscape with trees and a field, serving as a background for the text. The scene is bathed in a soft, orange glow, suggesting a sunrise or sunset. Several evergreen trees are scattered across the field, and a dense line of trees forms a horizon in the distance.

**All are welcome
the love of God to share
'cause all of us are
welcome here;
all are welcome in this place.**

A misty, golden-hour landscape with evergreen trees and a field. The scene is bathed in a warm, orange glow, suggesting a sunrise or sunset. The text is overlaid in white, bold font.

**3. Let's dream together
of the day
when earth and heaven are one,
a city built of love and light,
the new Jerusalem,**

A misty, golden-hour landscape with evergreen trees and a field. The scene is bathed in a warm, orange glow, suggesting a sunrise or sunset. The foreground shows a field with several evergreen trees, and the background is a dense forest of trees shrouded in mist. The overall mood is serene and hopeful.


**where our mourning
turns to dancing,
every creature lifts its voice!**



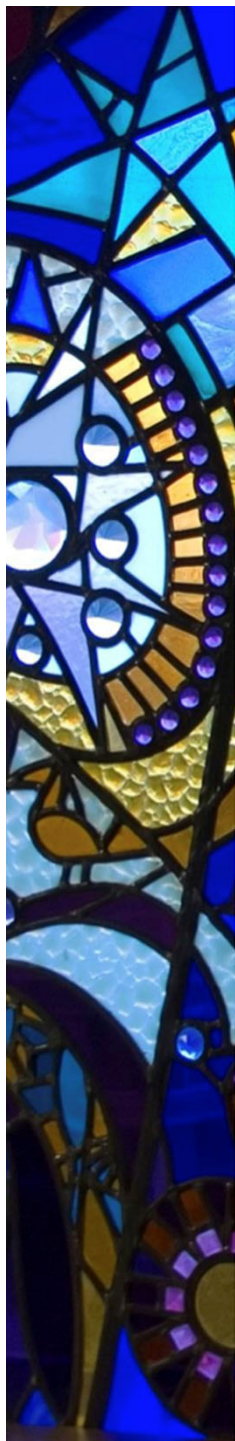
Refrain:

**Crying welcome,
welcome to this place.**

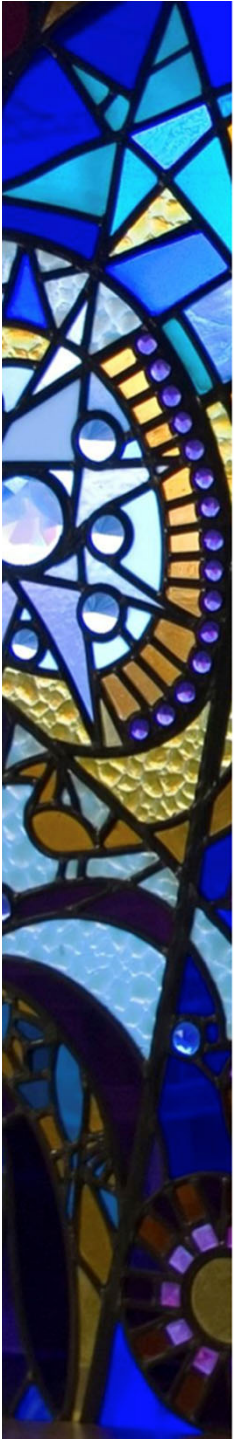
**You're invited
to come and know God's grace.**

A warm, golden-hued landscape with trees and a field, serving as a background for the text. The scene is bathed in a soft, orange glow, suggesting a sunrise or sunset. Several evergreen trees are scattered across the field, and a dense line of trees is visible in the distance. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and welcoming.

**All are welcome
the love of God to share
'cause all of us are
welcome here;
all are welcome in this place.**



Video clip
From: The Work of the
People
A visual Liturgy –
Migratory God by Phuc Luu



Exodus 22:21 (NRSV)

21 You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.



Questions: -

- 1. Have you ever moved from one place to another? What that experience has been for you?**
- 2. Why do people move from one country to another leaving behind everything that is familiar and comfortable?**
- 3. Friends how do you understand the concept that God migrates with the people?**



Questions: -

- 4. What are the three groups in the Hebrew Bible that are repeatedly named as recipients of biblical hospitality?**
- 5. What is the biblical mandate found in both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament on welcoming the stranger?**

Story of Ruth and Naomi from the Book of Ruth in the Bible.



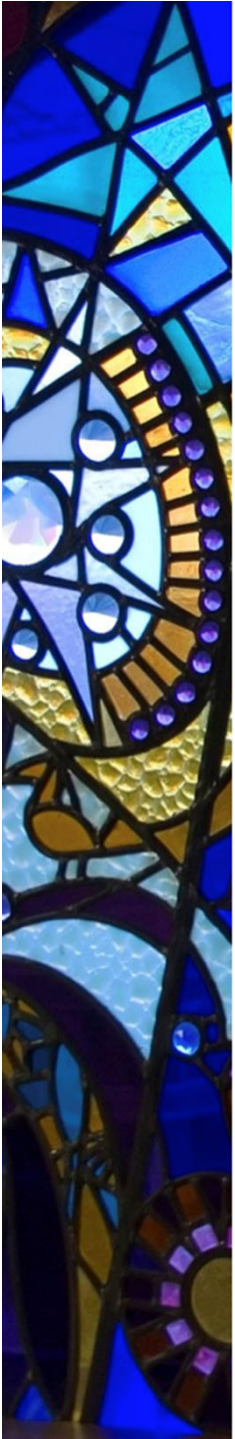


Story of Peter- Jewish disciple of Christ and Gentile Roman Centurion in Acts chapter 10



Questions: -

- 1. The question to us today is who are the Ruth's in our world who need to be included in our story as a Nation of immigrants and aliens?**
- 2. Do you have a similar experience of being welcomed by others?**
- 3. How is God at work within the immigrant communities?**



Questions: -

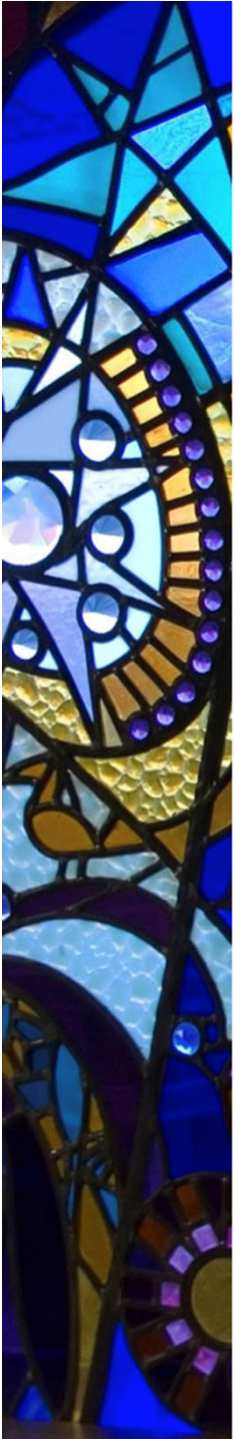
How is God at work within the immigrant communities?

What are the needs of the immigrants?

What can we do about it?

How is God moving you and the church today?

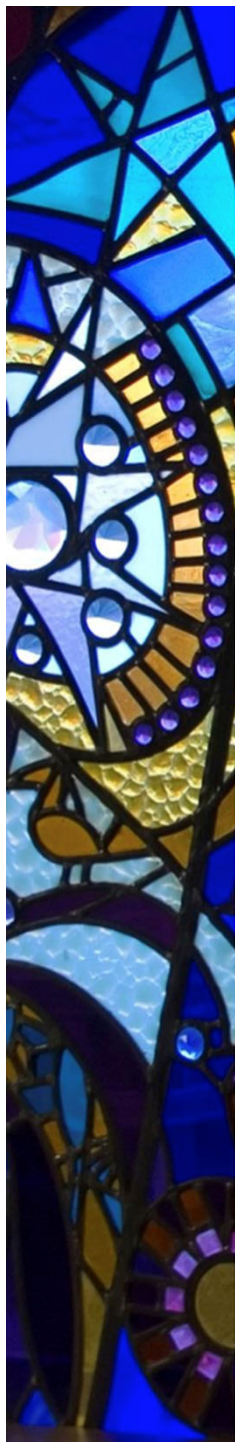
What is the United Methodist Church doing about the issue of Immigration?



National Justice For Our Neighbors

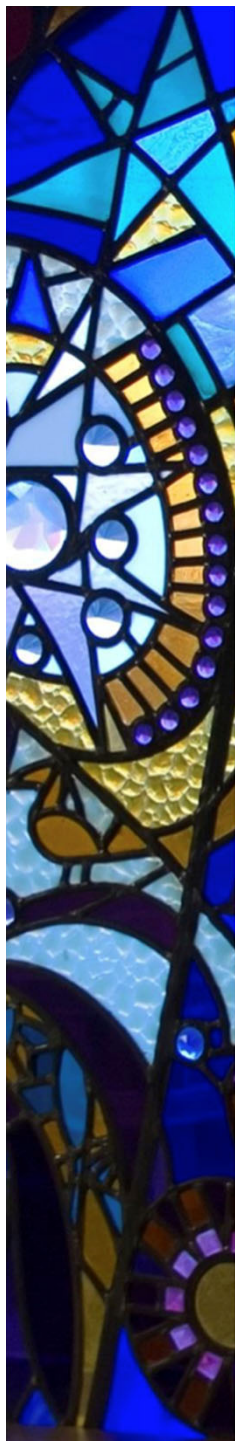
www.Jfon.org





Closing Prayer

Open our eyes that they may see the deepest needs of men and women. Move our hands that they may feed the hungry. Touch our hearts that it may bring warmth to the despairing. Teach us generosity that welcomes strangers. Let us share our possessions to clothe the naked.



Closing Prayer

Give us the care that strengthens the sick. Make us share in the quest to set the prisoners free. In sharing our anxiety and our love, our poverty, and our prosperity, we partake of your divine presence. Amen.

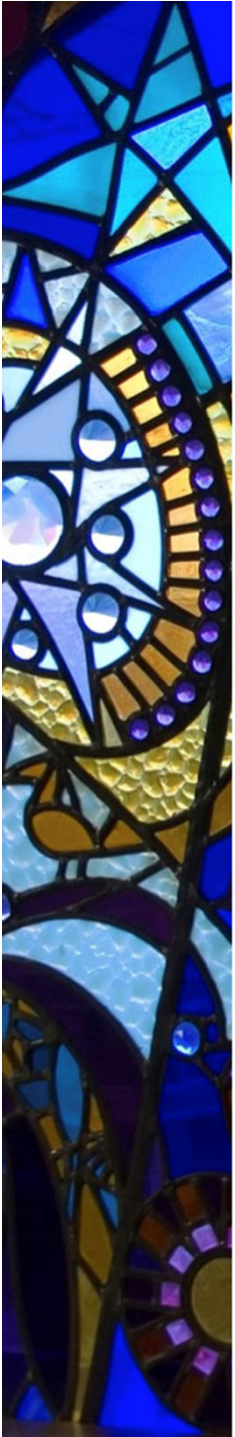
(Source: Canaan Banana, Zimbabwe. With All God's People: The New Ecumenical Prayer Cycle [Geneva: WCC Publications, 1989], 344).



A Four-Fold Franciscan Blessing in a responsive manner.

Leader: May God bless you with a restless discomfort about easy answers, half-truths and superficial relationships, so that you may seek truth boldly and love deep within your heart.

People: May God bless you with holy anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that you may tirelessly work for justice, freedom, and peace among all people.



May God bless you with the gift of tears to shed with those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation, or the loss of all that they cherish, so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and transform their pain into joy.

May God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you really CAN make a difference in this world, so that you are able, with God's grace, to do what others claim cannot be done.

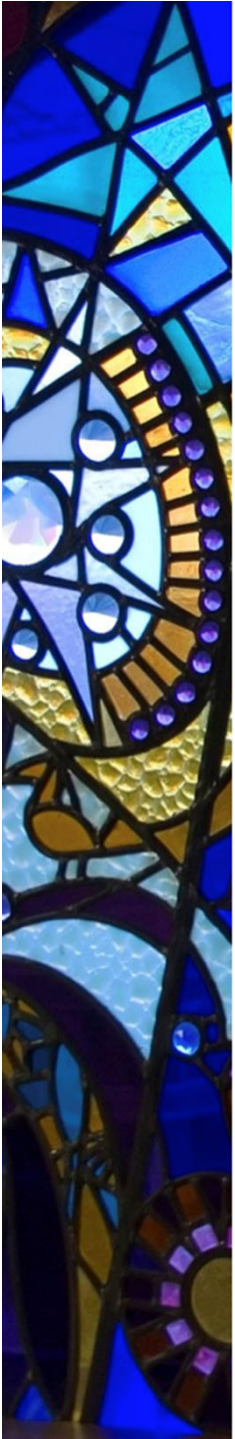
And the blessing of God the Supreme Majesty and our Creator, Jesus Christ the Incarnate Word who is our brother and Savior, and the Holy Spirit, our Advocate and Guide, be with you and remain with you, this day and forevermore. AMEN.



Kingdom of God and Immigration



Welcome all the participants in the room and explain that each session will start with a time of silence in which participants are asked to offer silent prayers. A candle is lit to signify God's presence with us. Water is poured in the basin to signify the baptismal rite in which water is the symbol of Christ's holy spirit that anoints believers.



We are Called TFWS 2172

A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a dark-colored Bible. The person is wearing a light-colored, possibly white, shirt. The Bible is held in a way that the cover is visible, and the hands are positioned on either side of it. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light color.


2172

We Are Called

WORDS: David Haas (Mic. 6:8)

**1. Come! Live in the light!
Shine with the joy and
the love of the Lord!
We are called**

© 1988 GIA Publications, Inc.


A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a dark-colored Bible. The Bible is open, and the words "HOLY BIBLE" are visible on the cover. The person is wearing a light-colored, possibly white, long-sleeved shirt. The background is a textured, light-colored fabric. Overlaid on the Bible is the text: "to be light for the kingdom, to live in the freedom of the city of God!".

**to be light for
the kingdom,
to live in the freedom
of the city of God!**




Refrain

**We are called
to act with justice,
we are called
to love tenderly,
we are called
to serve one another,
to walk humbly with God!**



**2. Come! Open your heart!
Show your mercy
to all those in fear!
We are called**


A photograph showing a person's hands holding a Bible over another person lying in a hospital bed. The Bible is open, and the word "BIBLE" is visible on the cover. The person in the bed appears to be resting or recovering. The text is overlaid in white, bold font.

**to be hope
for the hopeless
so all hatred
and blindness
will be no more!**




Refrain

**We are called
to act with justice,
we are called
to love tenderly,
we are called
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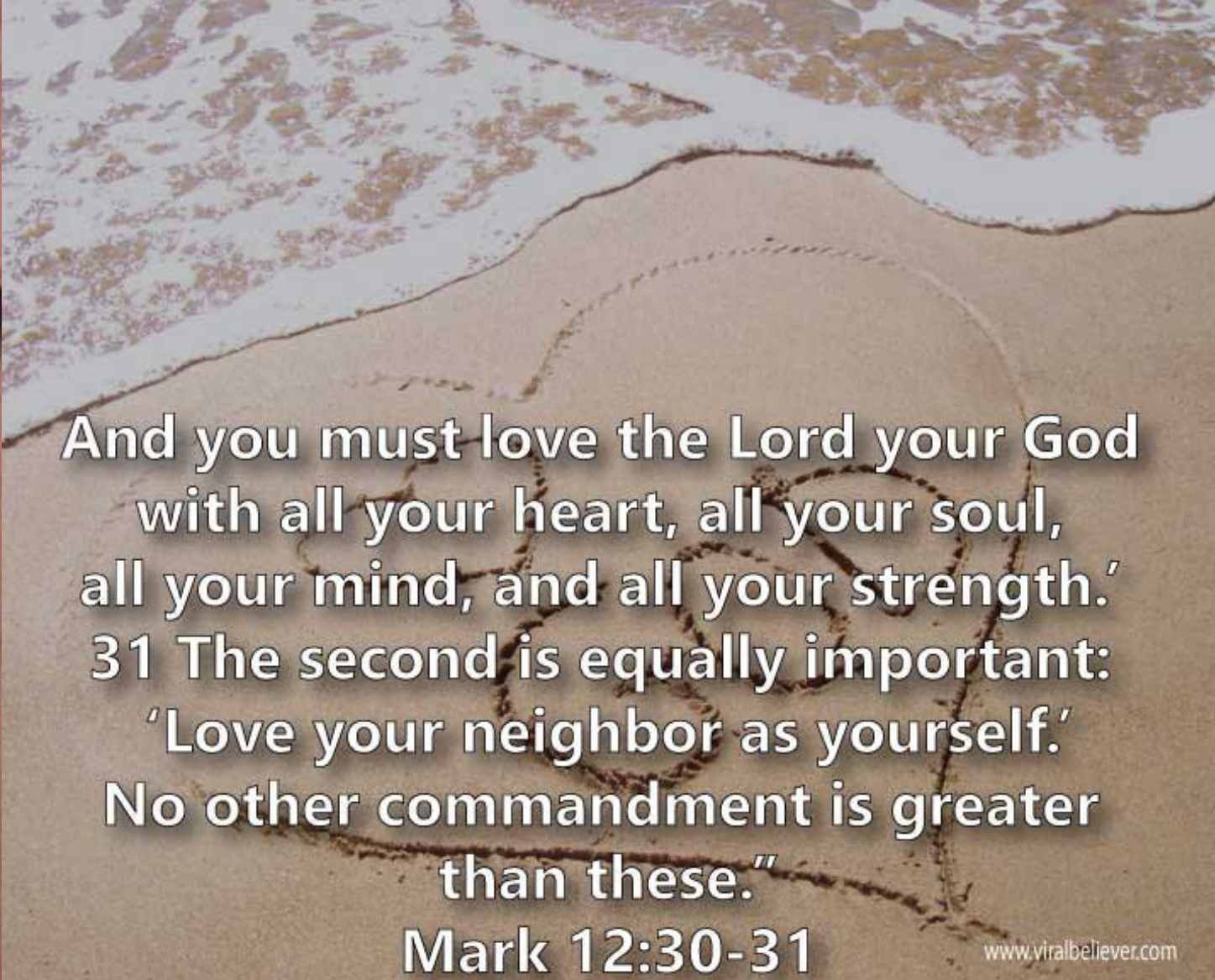
A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a dark-colored Bible. The person is wearing a light-colored, possibly white, long-sleeved shirt. The Bible is held open, and the text '3. Sing! Sing a new song! Sing of that great day when all will be one! God will reign,' is overlaid in large, bold, white font across the center of the image. The background is a textured, light-colored fabric.

**3. Sing! Sing a new song!
Sing of that great day
when all will be one!
God will reign,**



**and we'll walk
with each other
as sisters and brothers
united in love!**

Redefining Neighbor



And you must love the Lord your God
with all your heart, all your soul,
all your mind, and all your strength.’
31 The second is equally important:
‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’
No other commandment is greater
than these.”

Mark 12:30-31

www.viralbeliever.com

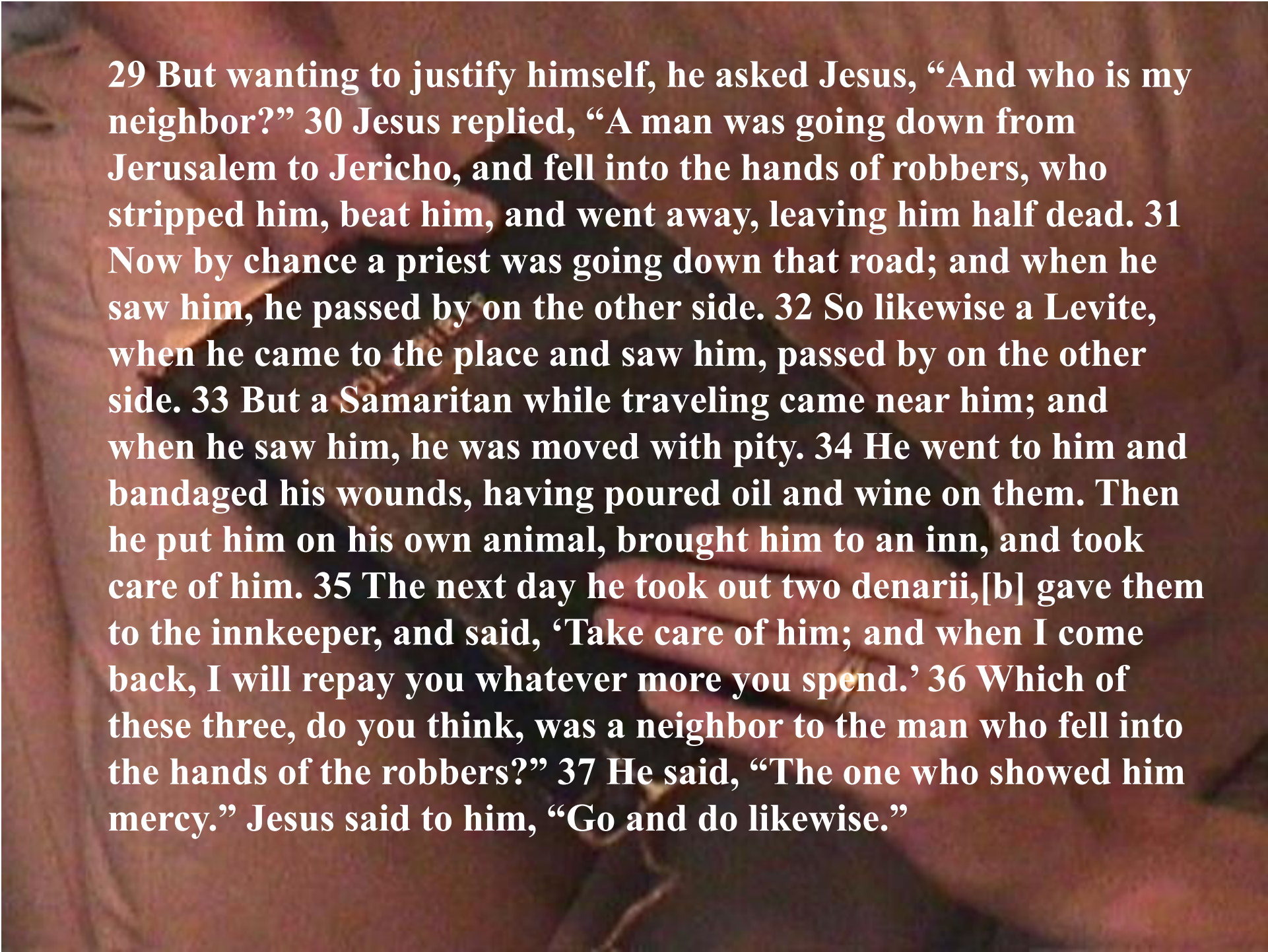
Parable of the Good Samaritan



The Parable of the Good Samaritan:

Luke 10:25-37

25 Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus.[a] “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” 26 He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” 27 He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” 28 And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”



29 But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” **30** Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. **31** Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. **32** So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. **33** But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. **34** He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. **35** The next day he took out two denarii,[b] gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’ **36** Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” **37** He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”



A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a dark, worn book. The person is wearing a reddish-brown shirt. The book is held in a way that its cover is visible, and it appears to be an old, leather-bound volume. The lighting is warm, highlighting the texture of the book and the person's skin.

JESUS AND THE KINGDOM

Brian McLaren discusses the liberating yet disturbing message from Jesus about living in the Kingdom of God.

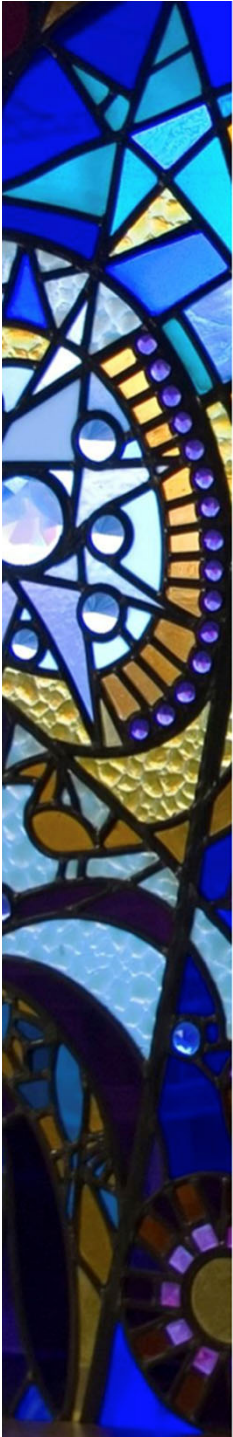


As Daisy Maehado has written, the undocumented worker, the unnamed woman, lives literally and figuratively within the open wound that is the U.S/ Mexico border. She is between worlds and excluded from the conditions of full thriving in both.

She is the ultimate outsider with no alternatives, no legal rights, no voice, no access to protection from those who have the power to exploit her labor and even her body. Fear, humiliation, exploitation, poverty and even physical abuse are a part of her reality, and to talk about justice for these women means to call into question the very structures of our society that are capable of such injustice.

Critical spatiality: Mhay's room and the kingdom of God

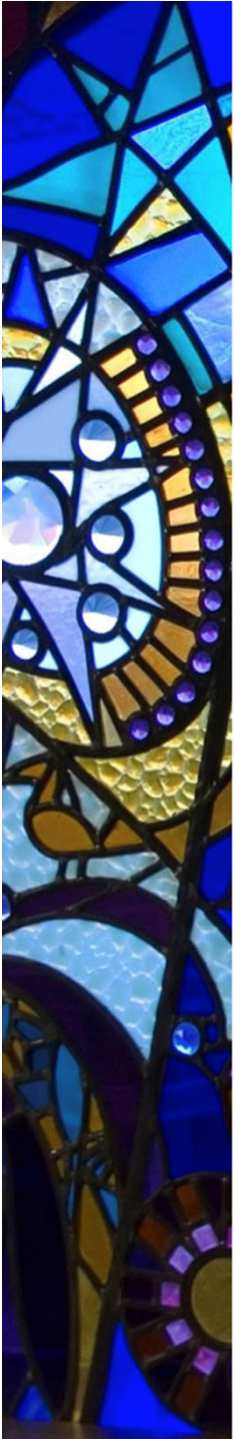
<http://web.b.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.drew.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=32&sid=65043700-642d-4ad0-9429-7a4f617e4be8%40sessionmgr103>



One migrant from Mexico said,

I have stowed away on baggage compartments of buses and almost suffocated in a boxcar; I almost froze to death in the mountains and baked to death in the deserts; I have gone without food and water for days, and nearly died on various occasions. As difficult as these are, these are not the hardest parts of being a migrant. The worst is when people treat you like you are a dog, like you are the lowest form of life on earth.

**Homeward Bound A Theology of Migration for Fullness of Life, Justice and Peace
Daniel G. Groody, CS.C.**



Meister Eckhart says that the goal of Christian life is not so much to seek the visio Dei (vision of God) in heaven as to see things in this life as God sees them. While our journey through life is situated within the citizenship in this world, ultimately it is grounded in citizenship of, and movement toward, our citizenship in the next.



Questions

1. What are contemporary images of the reign of God?

Share examples how you see kingdom of God is seen here and now in our midst.

2. What is Kinship (relationship between people of God) in the kingdom of God?

What are defining principles that govern our relationship with each other in the kingdom of God.



Questions

3. What parallels if any exist between institutionalized religion in Jesus time and organized religion today?

How can we go outside the church and can see new possibilities where the good news of Christ

4. What ministries might our local church develop or expand to show radical, inclusive hospitality to strangers?



Closing Prayer

We believe in almighty God, who guided God's people in exile and in exodus, the God of Joseph in Egypt and of Daniel in Babylon, the God of foreigners and immigrants. We believe in Jesus Christ a displaced Galilean, who was born away from his people and his home, who had to flee the country with his parents when his life was in danger, and who upon returning to his own country had to suffer the oppression of the tyrant Pontius Pilate, the servant of a foreign power.



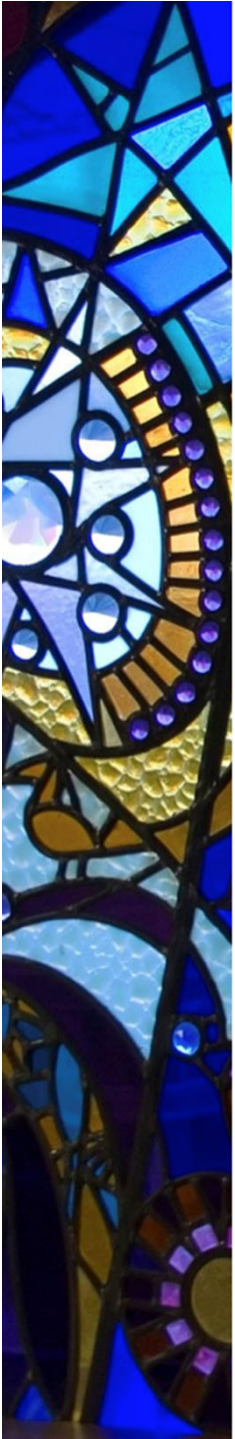
He was persecuted, beaten, tortured, and finally accused and condemned to death unjustly. But on the third day, this scorned Jesus rose from the dead, not as a foreigner but to offer us citizenship in heaven. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the eternal immigrant from God's Kin-dom among us, who speaks all languages, lives in all countries, and reunites all races. We believe that the church is the secure home for all foreigners and believers who constitute it; it speaks the same language and has the same purpose.



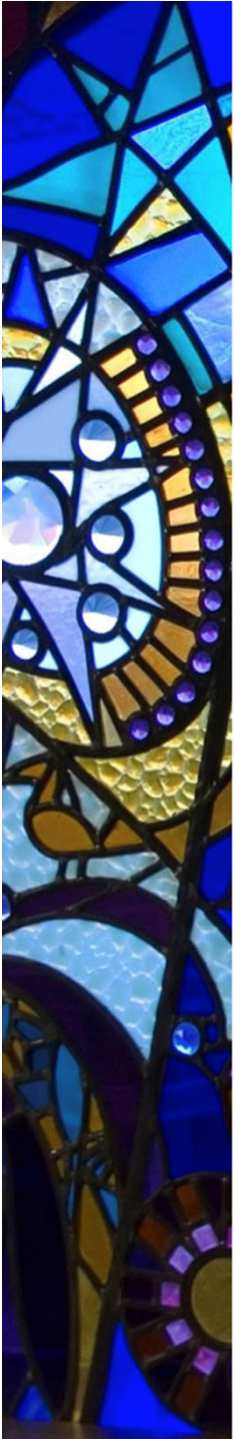
We believe that the communion of saints begins when we accept the diversity of the saints. We believe in forgiveness, which makes us all equal, and in reconciliation, which identifies us more than does race, language or nationality. We believe that in the Resurrection, God will unite us as one people in which all are distinct and all are alike at the same time. We believe in the eternal life beyond this world, where no one will be an immigrant but all will be citizens of God's Kin-dom that has no end. Amen.



Paradigm Shift in Mission- Missional Imagination



Welcome all the participants in the room and explain that each session will start with a time of silence in which participants are asked to offer silent prayers. A candle is lit to signify God's presence with us. Water is poured in the basin to signify the baptismal rite in which water is the symbol of Christ's holy spirit that anoints believers.



We are Called TFWS 2172

A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a dark-colored Bible. The person is wearing a light-colored, possibly white, long-sleeved shirt. The Bible is held in a way that the cover is visible, and the hands are positioned on either side of it. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light color.


We Are Called

WORDS: David Haas (Mic. 6:8)

2172

**1. Come! Live in the light!
Shine with the joy and
the love of the Lord!
We are called**

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**to be light for
the kingdom,
to live in the freedom
of the city of God!**




Refrain

**We are called
to act with justice,
we are called
to love tenderly,
we are called
to serve one another,
to walk humbly with God!**



**2. Come! Open your heart!
Show your mercy
to all those in fear!
We are called**


A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a dark-colored Bible. The Bible is held over a light-colored, wrinkled fabric, likely a bedsheet. The person's right hand is on the left side of the Bible, and their left hand is on the right side. A gold ring is visible on the left hand. The text is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif font.

**to be hope
for the hopeless
so all hatred
and blindness
will be no more!**




Refrain

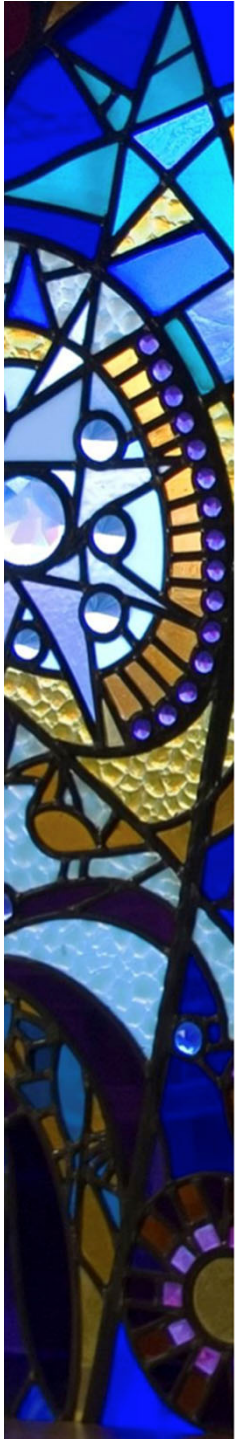
**We are called
to act with justice,
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A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a dark-colored Bible. The person is wearing a light-colored, possibly white, long-sleeved shirt. The Bible is held in a way that its cover is visible, and the word "HOLY" is partially legible on the spine. Overlaid on the image is white text in a bold, sans-serif font. The text reads: "3. Sing! Sing a new song! Sing of that great day when all will be one! God will reign,". The background is a soft, out-of-focus light brown or tan color.

**3. Sing! Sing a new song!
Sing of that great day
when all will be one!
God will reign,**

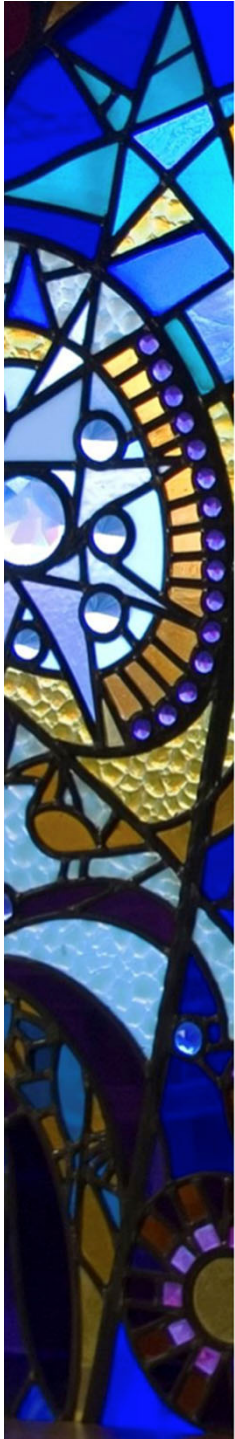


**and we'll walk
with each other
as sisters and brothers
united in love!**



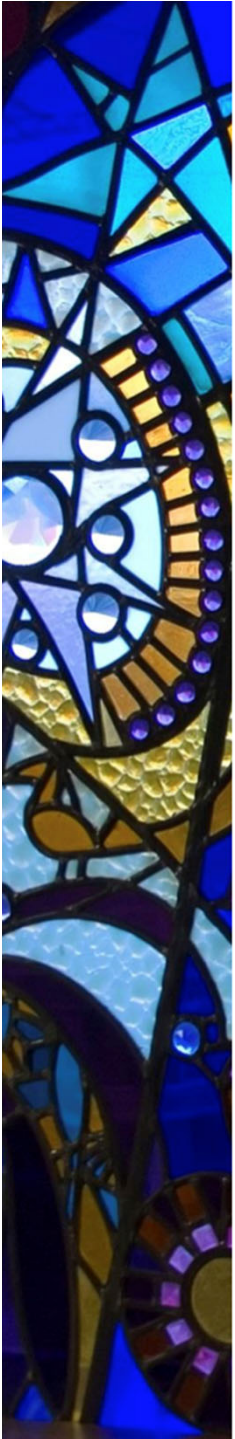
Mission of God

- God created human beings so that we might have fellowship with him and serve as faithful caretakers of his creation (Gen 1-2). God was to be the King who reigned over heaven and earth, and we were to be his people, those through whom he would implement his reign. God was making Israel as God's beloved community.
- Yet we sinned against God, disobeying him because of our prideful desire to equal to him. We were not satisfied with fellowship with the God.
- God was continuously pursuing God's people through the prophets and reconciling them back to the reign of God.



Mission of Jesus

- When all things failed in reconciling humankind God sent his only son Jesus Christ born of a virgin birth to reconcile humanity to God. The mission of Jesus was to point towards the reign of God(kingdom of God). To give the world the foretaste of the kingdom of God. He was persecuted and died on the Cross of Calvary for our sins and made a pathway for human beings to be once again reconciled with God. Through his death and resurrection embodied reign of God on earth. The cross of Christ invites us into the kingdom of God and restores us into intimate fellowship with him as God's subjects, servants, and beloved children.



Mission of Jesus

- Jesus was a Jew living under Roman oppression. Throughout his ministry he pointed to God's uncanny obsession with the least and the lost. God became disinherited to identity with the poor and social outcast for example- the prostitutes, the tax collectors and Samaritans. On the cross, God through Jesus shows solidarity with crucified people those who live on the borders and margins of society.



Mission Statement of Jesus: Luke 4:18-19

- 18 “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind,
- 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”^[f]



Mission of the Church

Matthew 28:18-20 NIV

- ¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”



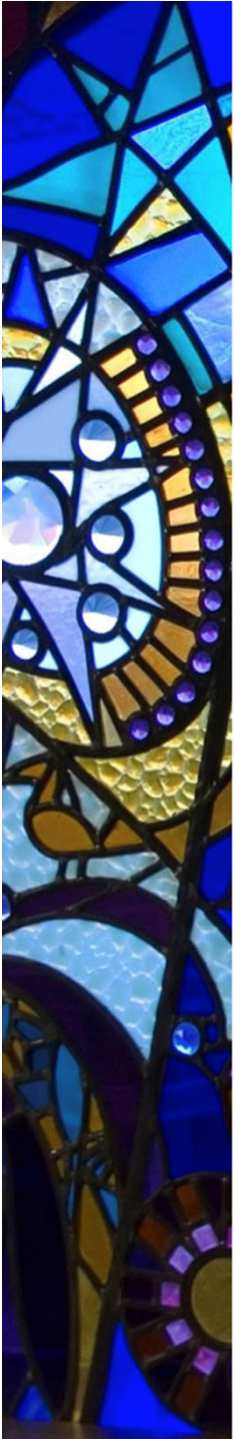
Missional Church- Sent people

- The word “mission” comes from the Latin word *missio*, which means “having been sent.” Since we have been sent to do God’s work, we are a “missional” community together. We are strengthened by the Holy spirit to actively pursue not only personal faith in Jesus, but also to be part of His kingdom community and to join him in his work of recreating a just world for all.

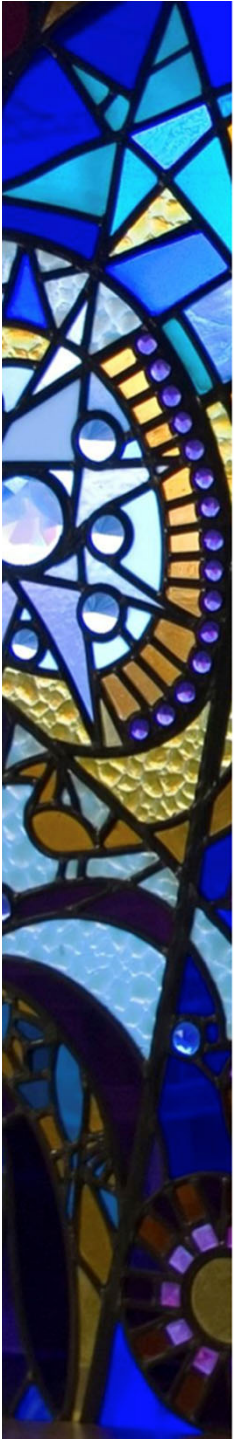


Strangers on the Journey:-Walk to Emmaus Luke 24: 13-33

- ¹³ Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles^[a] from Jerusalem. ¹⁴ They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. ¹⁵ As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; ¹⁶ but they were kept from recognizing him.
- ¹⁷ He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?”
- They stood still, their faces downcast. ¹⁸ One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, “Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?”



- ²⁵ He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.
- ²⁸ As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them.

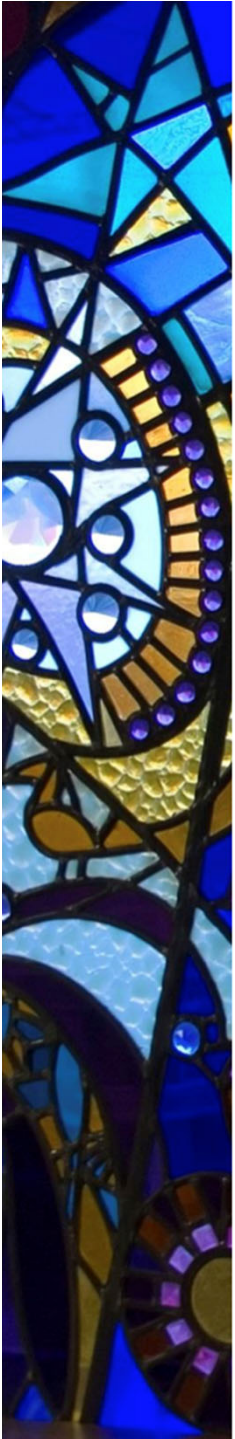


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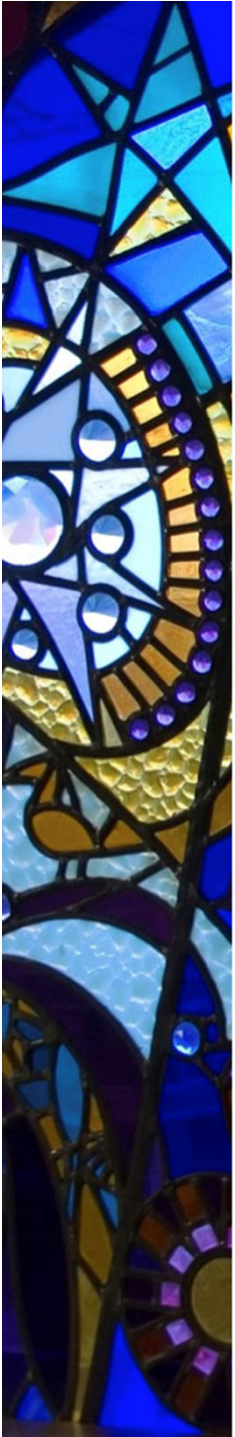
Questions

- Who is the stranger in the text?
- To welcome the stranger was to welcome the company of the divine. Who are the strangers in our community?
- The saying, “birds of a feather flock together” speaks about our affinity toward sameness, not difference. We are naturally drawn to what is like us. But if this is the case, then how can we know something new?
- How do you understand mission with respect to this statement- The world is at our door steps.



Sojourners article – Not a “White” Christmas: Future of Christianity in the world.

- Growth is found among people of color. In the U.S. Catholic community during the past half century, 71 percent of its growth has come from the Hispanic community. Fifty two percent of Catholic millennials who are people of color have a higher rate religious participation than whites. Now almost one out of five Americans who still attend church. According to their own reporting 43 % of such congregations report “high spiritual vitality” compared to 24 percent of white congregations.



Video on Missional Imagination

- – Texas Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church
- <https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/missional-imagination>
- Hanna, pastor of the FAM Community, an experiment in missional Christian community made up of refugees, immigrants, and native Houstonians, talks about forming missional Christian community shaped by practices of prayer, hospitality, and justice in apartment complexes in southwest Houston. The Gospel and resurrection in 3D



- What will be the ministry action plan for Centenary UMC? If we are called to be a welcoming community to immigrants and all God's people?
- What will our worship look like? - Music, language & tradition
- What will our congregation look like? –How can we be intentional?



- **What will our leadership look like?**
- **How will we engage in mission in our community?**

New communities in Metuchen NJ











Closing Prayer

We believe in almighty God, who guided God's people in exile and in exodus, the God of Joseph in Egypt and of Daniel in Babylon, the God of foreigners and immigrants. We believe in Jesus Christ a displaced Galilean, who was born away from his people and his home, who had to flee the country with his parents when his life was in danger, and who upon returning to his own country had to suffer the oppression of the tyrant Pontius Pilate, the servant of a foreign power.



He was persecuted, beaten, tortured, and finally accused and condemned to death unjustly. But on the third day, this scorned Jesus rose from the dead, not as a foreigner but to offer us citizenship in heaven. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the eternal immigrant from God's Kin-dom among us, who speaks all languages, lives in all countries, and reunites all races. We believe that the church is the secure home for all foreigners and believers who constitute it; it speaks the same language and has the same purpose.



We believe that the communion of saints begins when we accept the diversity of the saints. We believe in forgiveness, which makes us all equal, and in reconciliation, which identifies us more than does race, language or nationality. We believe that in the Resurrection, God will unite us as one people in which all are distinct and all are alike at the same time. We believe in the eternal life beyond this world, where no one will be an immigrant but all will be citizens of God's Kin-dom that has no end. Amen.

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