First Presbyterian Church's "Immigrant Discernment" Process: Priorities & Ways to Live These Out

On 2/18/25, the Session of First Presbyterian Church adopted the following statement:

"First Presbyterian Church of Iowa City opposes changes to federal policy allowing raids in churches and schools. We believe we are called to love our neighbors as ourselves and that churches should be places where people can feel safe. We cannot say we are a place where all are welcome if it is not safe for immigrants to be here."

On 9/14/25, a Session-driven Congregational Discernment gathering was convened to ask for input on next steps. The following questions were posed in the August/September newsletter notice for the gathering:

1. How do we welcome our neighbors?
2. What are our priorities as a congregation?
3. What are the priorities for each of us individually?
4. What is the best way to live these out?

Approximately 30 participants self-selected into five groups, with the three hosts and two volunteers recording responses on flip charts. FPC's Reconciliation Ministry (RM) offered to summarize collected comments and suggest them as Priorities for FPC as a Congregation and Priorities as Individual FPC members, aligned with Ways to Live these out. RM's summary, presented at the meeting of Session on 3/17/26, was as follows:

Priorities As a Congregation:	**Ways to Live These Out:**
1. Express concerns about Homeland Security / ICE violations of due process / other constitutional violations, & expedited deportations	-Partner with the PC(USA), its Office of of Public Witness, & the Presbytery of East Iowa
2. Become better informed about immigrant / refugee issues & opportunities for involvement	-Individual & panel presentations from involved organizations / agencies -Share summary information in Newsletters, *Wednesdays*, Moment for Mission, etc.
3. Invite immigrant / refugee families to FPC (for Worship, events, etc.)	-Letter from Session / RM sent to local service providers -Invite past immigrant members of FPC
4. Collaborate with other faith communities	-Facilitate through local clergy groups & Consultation of Religious Communities
5. Promote immigrant accompaniment at Homeland Security office in Cedar Rapids	-Provide information (via Newsletters, *Wednesdays,* Moment for Mission, etc.)

6. Provide funding & other immigrant support	-Via RM donations & assistance to organizations / agencies such as: Catherine McAuley Center, Consultation of Religious Communities, Houses into Homes, Immigrant Welcome Network of Johnson Co., Iowa City Catholic Worker House of Hospitality / Escucha Mi Voz Iowa, League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), Neighborhood Centers of Johnson County, & Open Heartland
7. Support & promote pathways to citizenship	-Provide English as a Second Language (ESL) & citizenship training programs (including funding & transportation assistance)
8. Establish communication with local police	-Seek consultation on safety / security
9. Utilize the power of prayer	In worship & FPC prayer circles

As Individuals:

1. Express concerns about Homeland Security / ICE violations of due process / other constitutional violations, & expedited deportations	-Contact state & national legislators (e.g., phone, postcards, letters / email, attend town hall gatherings, etc.) articulating concern about these matters
2. Participate in immigrant accompaniment at Homeland Security office in Cedar Rapids	-Join other FPC members, on monthly basis
3. Directly donate to & volunteer with organizations / agencies supporting immigrants / refugees	-See organizations / agencies noted above
4. Donate to & volunteer with FPC ministries & initiatives which support immigrants / refugees	-Participate in Congregational Health Ministries' "Kindness" initiatives, & with organizations / agencies noted above
5. Improve non-English communication skills	-Seek out resources, including other individuals at FPC
6. Self-directed citizenship engagement	-Follow local, state & national politics -Interact with government representatives at local, state & national levels (e.g. by phone calls, postcards, letters / email, attend town hall gatherings, etc.)

-Vote

7. Utilize the power of prayer -Develop an active personal prayer life

After reviewing the congregational & individual priorities, & the ways to live these out, feel free to contact John Barr (BarrJohnO@sau.edu) with further questions or concerns.

It should be appreciated that we currently have FPC members who are taking direct action to support the needs of local immigrants.

Angel & Carlos Calix, naturalization class graduates, now U.S. citizens

FPC members join supportive accompaniment outside Homeland Security office in Cedar Rapids

Nancy Gardner & Jeanie Wade-Nagle have initiated a weekly U.S. naturalization class on Tuesday evenings. To date, two individuals have attained citizenship, & two others are awaiting naturalization dates. A new class will starting soon. Nancy, Jeanie, & Laurie Thedens are also teaching a weekly ESL class at the Immigrant Welcome Network of Johnson County. These classes provide newly arrived immigrants with English skills needed for success in the workplace. On a monthly basis, Ann Grosscup, Sharon Raffensperger, John Barr, & Jeanie Wade-Nagle travel to the Homeland Security office in Cedar Rapids to join Escucha Mi Voz in the supportive accompaniment of people attending their mandatory check-ins.

Anyone interested in participating in these specific opportunities is welcome to contact the individuals mentioned above.

Submitted by John Barr, Reconciliation Ministry moderator