



Five Myths About Immigrants

By Dr. Alejandro Mandes

Myth: Immigrants are a modern day phenomenon

Actually, migration issues were prevalent in biblical times. Abraham moved from Ur of the Chaldeans to Canaan. Jacob moved to Egypt because of a famine. Joseph and Mary were refugees in Egypt to escape Herod's plan to kill Jesus. Israel and Judah were sent into exile because of their disobedience. In more recent time, Jews in Europe fled to Israel to avoid anti-Semitism during major wars. At the turn of the century, Americans benefitted from wave after wave of new immigrants who made this country an economic powerhouse.

Myth: Most immigrants are not Christian¹

Christians remain by far the largest religious group among legal U.S. immigrants, though their estimated share has decreased from 68 percent in 1992 to 61 percent in 2012. During the last two decades, the U.S. has admitted an estimated 12.7 million Christian immigrants.

Myth: Most immigrants are illegal

Of the more than 40 million immigrants residing in the United States, $\frac{3}{4}$ are legal immigrants. More than 40 percent of the illegal $\frac{1}{4}$ came in with a legal visa, but overstayed their visa. At this time, overstaying your visa is an administrative violation and a misdemeanor.²

Myth: Immigrants are not learning English

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, today's immigrants are learning English at a faster rate than other generations. In fact, close to half of new immigrants report high English-language speaking ability, according to Census Bureau reports.³ According to the Pew Research Center, about six out of 10 U.S. adult Hispanics (62 percent) speak English or are bilingual.⁴ In general, older immigrants have a hard time learning English, but that trend is consistent throughout history.

Myth: Syrian refugees are given a free pass to enter the US.

Recent examples show how governments fail to perfectly vet a Syrian refugee. However, the United States government has procedures far exceeding what is done in Europe. In a document titled, "Background Briefing On the Mechanics of the United States Refugee Admissions Program," the government lays out the procedure for vetting refugees. Currently, it takes between 18 to 24 months, or longer, to process a case from referral or application to arrival in the United States.⁵ Most of this vetting takes place outside of the U.S. border, which is part of the reason the vetting takes place.

1. <http://www.pewforum.org/2013/05/17/the-religious-affiliation-of-us-immigrants/>

2. <http://www.tolerance.org/immigration-myths>

3. <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2014/cb14-105.html>

4. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/03/24/a-majority-of-english-speaking-hispanics-in-the-u-s-are-bilingual/>

5. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/09/246843.htm>

10 Ways to Love Immigrants

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1. **See them.** Jesus told the disciples to open their eyes and see that the fields are white for harvest (John 4:35; ESV). Often, we are too into our own world to even notice the immigrants all around us. Take the time to look.
2. **Greet them.** You may not speak their language, but you can smile. You would be surprised at how much a small smile communicates as a cross-cultural expression.
3. **Guide them.** If they look lost in a social setting (school, grocery store or transportation venue), ask them if they need help. While traveling to Japan, I felt invisible as people rushed around. At the restaurant, little info was in English except one word “Full,” but everyone pushed past the sign to get in the restaurant while I waited for the sign to turn off. No one offered to tell me the full sign had nothing to do with the restaurant.
4. **Pray for them.** Don't ask if you can pray for them initially – just pray. Pray for their peace. Pray for their salvation. Pray for God to help you find a way into their life. Ask them if you can pray when they are sick, traveling or for their children in school.
5. **Serve them.** Don't make big offers initially. If you know them, offer to take their children to school. Offer to explain official documents. Let their need guide you. The sky is the limit. One immigrant missed her immigration meeting because she was sick. A lady from our church went to the INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service) and fought for her. She got a rare reprieve and won the love of an immigrant.

Five Things to Avoid

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1. Don't ask them where they are from as the start of a conversation. They hear that question all the time, usually with a negative implication.
 2. Don't single them out in a crowd. Most immigrants are trying to fly below the radar because they are insecure in a new setting.
 3. Don't ask them if they are legal. They probably are, but it's not a conversation starter.
 4. If they are undocumented, it is unlawful to give them work.
 5. If they are undocumented, you are NOT required to “turn them in,” according to the law.
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6. **Share a meal.** For many cultures, sharing a meal as family is a bonding experience. Before the meal, ask them if there are any foods or traditions with which you should be familiar. One time, an Indian couple invited us to a meal at their house. They provided utensils for us to use in the meals, but they used their fingers. When I followed their example, they beamed with joy. We all laughed at my clumsiness in doing it. That experience led to a bonding, as well as discipleship, experience. From our church, the husband went to seminary.
 7. **Bless them.** If they work for you, give them a double portion. When Boaz met Ruth, he showed her unexpected hospitality and generosity, though she was a foreigner (Ruth 2:10-13; ESV). It was noted. It was the beginning of a special relationship. Go out of your way to provide for another.
 8. **Defend them.** Many people take advantage of immigrants. They are shorted pay. They are physically/sexually abused. If they allow, speak up for them.
 9. **Let them teach you.** After you get to know them, show interest in learning from them. Ask about their country, religion and the culture of their people. Read about their country. Pull out a map of their country and let them walk you through the land.
 10. **Point them to Jesus.** If you have done the other nine items above, don't be surprised by their interest in your God. For many immigrants, relationship and trust give you the right to share about the God of your life. Don't be pushy. Let it happen.

