

## 3D

# Immigration

People have moral responsibilities to provide succor and relief to their fellow human beings fleeing war, violence, persecution, and natural disasters, regardless of their race, nationality, or religion (see [Leviticus 19:33-34](#), [Matthew 25:31-45](#), and [Alma 27:21-24](#)).

## GOALS

1. To recognize that migrants — refugees, immigrants, asylees, and more — are our fellow human beings, endowed by the Creator with unalienable natural rights.
2. To create a compassionate immigration system that welcomes the stranger in an organized and systematic way that sustains the rule of law.

God’s interaction with His children can be seen as a constant narrative of migration, movement, and change. Repeatedly, figures from the scriptures become “strangers and pilgrims on the earth” ([Hebrews 11:13](#)). “By faith” Abraham and Sarah “sojourned . . . in a strange country” ([Hebrews 11:9](#)), where they found property and posterity. “By faith [Moses] forsook Egypt” ([Hebrews 11:27](#)) and sought a promised land. [Lehi and Sariah](#) fled home as religious refugees. And as political refugees, Mary, Joseph, and the Christ child [sought refuge in Egypt](#).

One of the most profound scriptural stories — where migration was the pivotal moment in forming an identity of God’s people — is the Exodus. Rabbi Shai Held, author of “[Judaism Is About Love](#),” [notes](#) that the Israelites’ flight from Egypt teaches “something radical: a society that actively loves and seeks the welfare of its most vulnerable members. . . . The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens. You shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”

Rabbi Held [continues](#):

Since we know vulnerability, the plight of the vulnerable — whether among our own kin or among those who do not look or pray or speak like us — makes an especially forceful claim on us. . . . To tell the story of our past is always also to internalize an ethical injunction for our present and our future: to love the stranger, for we know what it feels like to be a stranger — we know the vulnerability, the anxiety, and the loneliness — having ourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt.

## SCRIPTURE STUDY

*“But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.”*  
— [Leviticus 19:34](#)

*“Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.”*  
— [Hebrews 13:2](#)

When we recognize our own displacement, we might understand why, as one Old Testament scholar [has noted](#), “welcoming the stranger . . . is the most often repeated commandment in the Hebrew scriptures, with the exception of the imperative to worship only the one God.” Thus Jesus Christ explained that, after loving God, we must love our neighbor — and then told of the foreigner (a Samaritan) as the ideal neighbor and a contributor to society.

Indeed Christ — the only true Master of the land — placed Himself in the role of the stranger and pleaded with us to welcome the displaced: “I was a stranger,” He said, “and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me.” Having thus welcomed the “stranger” or foreigner, Christ welcomes us: “Come . . . inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” ([Matthew 25: 34-36](#)).

*“Their story is our story, not that many years ago.*

— Elder Patrick Kearon, [“Refuge from the Storm,”](#) Ensign, April 2016

The winter of [1838-39](#) remains one of the bleakest in the history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The prophet Joseph Smith and many of his closest colleagues were [imprisoned](#) in Liberty Jail. [Warfare](#) had erupted between Missourians and Church members, leading to the infamous [executive order](#) from Governor Lilburn Boggs that the Mormons be driven from Missouri — or exterminated.

When upwards of 10,000 members of the Church fled Missouri, a community of only 1,500 people in Quincy, Illinois, [took in](#) half of them. “The Mormons were in need of shelter, food, clothing, and jobs and were received with great humanity. There was perhaps no greater time of need in Latter-day Saint history than in Quincy during that winter.”

Reflecting on the hospitality of Quincy residents, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland [said](#), “We need to encourage local citizens to welcome [refugees] into their everyday lives.” Church leaders have advocated for this moral responsibility, as when the First Presidency issued [this official statement](#):

As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we are deeply committed to living the two great commandments to love God and love our neighbor. . . . It is therefore with great concern and compassion that we observe the plight of more than 70 million people around the world who have fled their homes seeking relief from violence, war, or religious persecution.

We encourage Church members and friends to respond appropriately and legally, to help create welcoming communities by volunteering their time, talents, and friendship to individuals and families who are integrating into our societies.

Our experiences of [displacement and dispossession](#) help us embrace the moral responsibility to provide succor and relief to those fleeing war, violence, persecution, and natural disasters.

A beautiful example of a society that did just this is found in the Book of Mormon story of the [Anti-Nephi-Lehies](#). Religious converts faced violence and even extermination until the people of Nephi offered up the land of Jershon as an “inheritance” to them. Inheritances are usually given to family members; thus did one people welcome another — those who had been their mortal enemies! — into their land as fellow Saints and family. They enacted the charge of [Ephesians 2:19](#): “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God.” By treating the stranger among us as one of our own, we too become fellowcitizens in Christ.

### **What do you think?**

- *The scriptures are filled with stories of immigrants and refugees. What do you learn from those who had to flee? From those who did (or did not) welcome them? In addition to the stories mentioned above, consider [Hagar](#), [Joseph of Egypt](#), and [Ruth and Naomi](#). What cautions are there in scripture for those who refuse to welcome the stranger?*

## **PRINCIPLES ON WHICH TO BASE IMMIGRATION POLICY**

The United States of America is a nation of immigrants, and immigrants continue to [strengthen and enrich](#) our country. There is [overwhelming bipartisan American support](#) for policies that prioritize security and order while responding to humanitarian needs and spiraling backlogs. Here we propose principles that should guide discussions on immigration policy and reform.

### **1 | ALWAYS SEE THE VALUE OF THE INDIVIDUAL. DO NOT EXPLOIT OR DEHUMANIZE DISPLACED PEOPLES.**

*The value of each individual is foundational to the concept of democracy. Additionally, as women of faith we know that each human being is a child of God, created equal and worthy of human dignity. As a result, we should treat all humans, including immigrants, as worthwhile and valuable, and not as political pawns. We should reject rhetoric that dehumanizes others and denies them the dignity and worth inherent in each person. Elected officials, candidates for political office, and the American people should respect the dignity and humanity of migrants.*

*Unfortunately, at all levels of government, some candidates and elected officials have used immigration to foment division among Americans. **Exploiting immigration — and people’s lives — as a constant campaign issue is a zero-sum interpretation of immigration policy that Americans can reject.** Misinformation and scapegoating of immigrants must not be used to score political points or win votes.*

## 2 | DEMOCRACY IS SUPPORTED BY THE RULE OF LAW.

Fair and just laws and policies strengthen our country by establishing trust in our institutions. A healthy civic environment requires that laws are effective and just and that they are uniformly enforced. Effective laws should create humane systems that enable compassionate treatment of others. Sovereign nations have a prerogative to secure their borders and establish protocols or means for travel and access across them. As part of this response, nations have a [moral](#) and [legal imperative](#) to address [claims of asylum](#) and to establish a process for legal immigration.

In a [statement](#) from 2011, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints noted: "Unchecked and unregulated, such a flow [of undocumented immigrants] may destabilize society and ultimately become unsustainable." As Paul [wrote](#) to the Corinthian saints, "Let all things be done decently and in order."

Governing according to the [rule of law](#) also requires our nation to uphold [federal](#) and [international](#) laws that [allow](#) people to apply for asylum. Such laws were created after the experience of European Jewish refugees during World War II. [Rejected](#) from countries that might have given them asylum, many were returned to Europe and some, to the gas chambers.

How do we uphold the **rule of law through a lens of ethical government**? First, we recognize that good governance always identifies and embraces tensions; good and ethical policy will work to balance the competing needs and demands of a diverse society. Second, we must improve our policies and our legal systems to both strengthen us and help us welcome people with compassion, wisdom, and order. **Strong laws are not the enemy of compassion.** They can and should go hand in hand.

## 3 | GOOD POLICY CREATES FAIR AND BENEFICIAL SYSTEMS.

It is neither responsible nor compassionate to allow migrants to enter into circumstances of prolonged uncertainty, where their legal status is unresolved and there are no systems in place to provide early transitional support. The lack of good policy creates unfair systems that potentially expose people to abuse and harm; this gap also limits the ability of both private citizens and the government to effectively help them. In the case of immigration, without fair and properly funded systems in place, vulnerable human beings can be economically or politically exploited.

On the other hand, secure borders and compassionate policies allow people — including refugees and asylum seekers — to enter legally and orderly, while keeping out illicit substances and human smuggling. Once admitted, immigrants need systems in place — courts and judges — so processing moves quickly. Modernizing and speeding the asylum process can be combined with providing adequate personnel, technology, and operations to secure U.S. borders.

With **the importance of good policy** in mind, we affirm the need for political pathways to lasting solutions. The power to regulate immigration law resides in the “political branches,” understood to refer to the legislative branch, or Congress, and the executive branch. Generally, Congress makes immigration legislation while the executive branch has prosecutorial and emergency discretion. Congress is the entity that can reform immigration law, something it has not done substantially for decades.

#### 4 | **BIPARTISAN SOLUTIONS ARE POSSIBLE! ELECTED OFFICIALS MUST WORK TOGETHER PEACEABLY.**

*Despite this responsibility, self-seeking politicians have weaponized immigration and manipulated our emotions for their own power. Immigration has become a wedge issue that evokes very polarized responses.*

*We can replace this with bipartisan cooperation and compromise. Bipartisan legislation would respect the separation of powers, operate inside Constitutional norms, support the rule of law, and free vulnerable immigrants from political limbo. Thoughtful immigration legislation would strengthen democracy while demonstrating both compassion and justice. It would also [strengthen us economically](#) — immigrants, freed from a state of political limbo, could [contribute](#) even more than they [already are](#) to the American economy and society at large. Good immigration policy is a symbiotic relationship between the needs of individual immigrants and the needs of our country.*

#### 5 | **GOOD POLICYMAKING REQUIRES DEDICATED PEACEMAKING.**

*President Russell M. Nelson has [taught](#) that “true disciples of Jesus Christ are peacemakers” and has encouraged us to “show that there is a peaceful, respectful way to resolve complex issues and an enlightened way to work out disagreements.”*

*Peacemaking is core to MWEG’s advocacy. [For us](#), peacemaking:*

- *Is proactive and courageous.*
- *Seeks to unify instead of divide.*
- *Demands great tolerance for people and none for injustice.*
- *Views human suffering as sacred.*
- *Chooses love instead of hate.*
- *Believes that ultimate peace is not only possible, but sure.*

*Immigration reform is complex, but peacemaking can lead us to enlightened ways to improve a system in disarray. How do you see immigration reform differently when you view it **through the lens of peacemaking**?*