



**Central
District
Conference**

A conference of
Mennonite Church USA

focus

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KNOWING CHRIST'S LOVE—ANSWERING GOD'S CALL

Conversations about immigration: Start with the Bible

As Christians, our conversations about immigration must reflect what the Bible shows us, Daniel Carroll Rodas told a gathering of members of Goshen and Elkhart congregations on Sunday, March 19.

Two Central District Conference congregations, Eighth Street in Goshen and Hively Avenue in Elkhart, hosted the event at Eighth Street with funding from a CDC Reign of God grant. They invited Carroll, a Wheaton College Old Testament professor, to share insights about the Bible and immigration. As the son of a Guatemalan mother and a US father, he has lived and taught in both countries. Thus, his own experiences and his biblical study come together to help shape a vision for how Christians can have conversations about immigration that are consistent with their faith.

We should be strangers here

Carroll explained that when he talks with Christians about immigration, it is often the same kind of conversation he could have with anyone—focused on worry about issues such as the economy and violence. These are good issues to consider, he said, but “we need to begin to frame these in self-consciously Christian ways.”

I Peter tells us we are all strangers, Carroll pointed out. “It’s not surprising that migration becomes a metaphor for what it means to be a Christian: we have a different king, we have a different citizenship, we should have a different set of values.” As we begin to move into the immigration discussion, we can remember that this should be a strange place for us and remind ourselves what it means to be a Christian, Carroll suggested.

Bible’s stories tell of migration

Carroll reminded the 150 people present of how migration was a part of many stories of God’s

(continued on the next page)



Photo by J. Tyler Klassen

Daniel Carroll Rodas focused on how Christians can talk about immigration in ways consistent with our faith at a gathering on March 19 in Goshen, Ind.

people. For example, Abram told Sarai to pretend to be his sister when they approached a checkpoint on their journey to Egypt. “Here is Abram, the father of the faith, lying to get across the border—because he is hungry,” he pointed out. He also asked his audience to imagine the discomfort of Joseph introducing his Bedouin shepherd father to the Pharaoh and the awkwardness of Naomi bringing her Moabite daughter-in-law back to her homeland.

Carroll found parallels between the situation of the Israelite slaves in Egypt and current tensions in the US with Latino immigrants. The Egyptians were afraid of the Israelites because they were multiplying. So the Egyptians made it harder for them to work even though they needed that work to be done. It’s a human reaction, Carroll admitted, and then suggested, “We are becoming the Egyptians.”

God’s laws favor the foreigner

In examining the laws God established for the people of Israel, Carroll again emphasized the central role of migration. In that culture, when foreigners did not have family to care for them or any way of obtaining land, “God shapes the law to protect them,” he said. The law tells them to treat foreigners as their own people and even include them in worship—the most precious part of Israelite life.

“The history of the human race is the history of migration. Migration is in our DNA,” Carroll added.

To his Mennonite listeners, Carroll said, “If there’s any migrant denomination in the world, it’s you. You should know [the experience of being an immigrant]. This is who you are. You more than anyone else should claim that heritage and be a beacon.”

Carroll’s concluding call came from Deuteronomy 10: “God says something very profound: ‘You will love the foreigner because I do.’ When people ask why should we love the stranger, it’s because God does. I can’t give you a better reason than that.”

Carroll is author of *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church and the Bible*, published by Brazos Press. Mennonite Mission Network has published a volume by Carroll, “Immigration and the Bible,” in their *Missio Dei* series.

Special presentation for youth

Earlier in the afternoon of March 19, high school youth from the area gathered to hear both Daniel Carroll Rodas and Dara Marquez, an undocumented young adult.

Marquez came to Elkhart, Ind., when she was three years old. While in high school, she became involved in Indiana Undocumented Youth Alliance and she continues to share her story to build awareness of issues faced by undocumented children and young people.

Because of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), Marquez earned a chemistry degree and now is pursuing an advanced degree in engineering. She pointed out, though, that this status is vulnerable and it does not protect family members. “We cannot be OK with just deferred action.”

She added, “Even though immigration is a political topic, it’s also something that affects the human dignity of families you come across.”

Carroll followed Marquez with two biblical stories—Daniel and Ruth. “All of this is very close to the heart of God,” he said as he encouraged the youth people to be understanding of people on the margins. “It’s going to be awkward and it’s going to be weird, and it’s going to be bad sometimes. But if God’s in it, it’s what we should be into also.”

CDC Annual Gathering

June 22-24, Bluffton, Ohio

We will gather at Bluffton University, hosted by the CDC West Ohio Region: First (Bluffton), Cincinnati, Grace, Lima, Emmaus Road, and Shalom Community

The May issue of *Reporter* will give details about speakers, worship, lodging and special features of the annual gathering.

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