

DISCUSSION GUIDE: *HAWO'S DINNER PARTY*



>> The film *Hawo's Dinner Party: The New Face of Southern Hospitality* is a 30 minute film, adapted from the feature length documentary, *Welcome to Shelbyville* by Kim Snyder. Below you'll find suggestions for how to use the story to support your work, as well as related data, scriptural references, discussion prompts, and tips for productive dialogue. Feel free to pick and choose sections of this guide that best support the kind of conversation you'd like to have.

How to Use *Hawo's Dinner Party* to Spark Discussions About Immigration

Hawo's Dinner Party: The New Face of Southern Hospitality tells the story of Hawo, a Somali refugee and former nurse –who now works at a poultry processing plant in a small Tennessee town– and the handful of local residents who come together to help create a more integrated and thriving community. The story puts a human face on the complex issues we face in this time of increasing globalization and changing demographics. This short length makes it ideal for an event that allows ample time for discussion and related activities. Here are a few ideas to start:

- **Ask your church leader to incorporate it into their preaching and teaching** to put a human face to the experiences of immigrants and refugees, especially those from Muslim-majority countries.
- **Organize an invite-only "VIP" screening** with elected officials, journalists, community and opinion leaders to debunk stereotypes and encourage more welcoming policies toward the "stranger."
- **Incorporate story into your professional development** to train staff or orient volunteers to the issues and enhance cultural competency.
- **Partner up with another congregation or group** that serves a primarily immigrant population to forge/strengthen new partnerships, collaborations, and service activities across religious, cultural, and/or citizenship divides.
- **Bring it to your Bible study, share group, or women's fellowship** to connect your faith and scripture to real-life experiences.
- **Create a safe space using film and a meal** (check out the [Recipe Book](#) or [Welcoming Stories](#)) to break the ice, reduce stereotypes, and spark bridge-building across cultures, faith and citizenship.
- **Host a public screening event** to recruit new volunteers or raise funds for programs that support newcomers.

[Click here](#) to see examples of how others used the film to support their own activities.

For more ideas and event planning support, check out the "[Hawo's Dinner Party Event Planning and Facilitation Guide](#)."

Facilitation Tips

A facilitator's job is to create a safe space for discussion, while encouraging participants to share their experiences and insights in a respectful and productive way. Here are some tips:

- **Take some time to identify your own 'hot-button' issues** in advance of the screening. This will give you ample time to reflect and process your emotions so you can focus fully on facilitating the discussion.
- **Start the discussion by acknowledging that people may have different views on immigration**, and that we can learn valuable things when we share our views with and listen to each other.
- **If you're working in a religious setting, start with an opening prayer** that grounds your discussion in the scriptural basis for treating the "stranger" or the immigrant with respect, dignity, and love.
- **Plan ahead for how you will respond to possibly offensive comments.** You might acknowledge, for example, the good intentions behind a comment, then remind everyone of the purpose for the discussion.
- **Set ground rules to help foster a safe space for dialogue.** For example, remind people: there are no wrong answers and people are encouraged to share opinions, not convince others they are right; to make "I" statements and speak from their own experiences, and; allow an opportunity for everyone to be heard.

Discussion Prompts

Here are some smart ways to start a conversation after you share *Hawo's Dinner Party* with your group. You can customize the discussion with some of the relevant data and scripture we've collected below.

Conversation Starters (highly recommended)

- What, if anything, struck you about this story? Please explain.
- What moment or experience depicted can you most relate to? Please explain.

Going Deeper

- Hawo describes the loss of loved ones, home and her life before the war in Somalia. She came to Shelbyville to find work and build a new life for her family. **What emotional and spiritual effect do you think being a newcomer might have** on you if you were Hawo? What basic support would you need from your new community?
- **What factors contributed to some of the misunderstandings** between the Somali residents of Shelbyville and their neighbors? Consider your own community. Do you see similar factors that do –or might—contribute to misunderstandings between groups? Please explain.

Do you need help?

ONWARD makes it easy to discuss sensitive issues in grounded and responsible ways. But don't hesitate to get more help if you need it. Consider your group and decide if it makes sense to bring in an experienced co-facilitator.

- At Thanksgiving dinner, one guest suggests there may be some similarities between Catholicism and Islam. **Can you think of some shared values or beliefs** you share with Somalis and long-term residents featured in the story? If so, what are they?
- One resident expresses the opinion that if Somalis want to live in Shelbyville, they **“need to dress like we do, speak our language and live like we do.”**
 - **Do you agree?** Should people always adhere to local customs such as dress, even if it is contrary to their beliefs? In a similar situation, would you? Why or why not?
 - What American cultural or religious groups have dress codes (Catholic nuns, Orthodox Jews, Amish, etc.)? **Are perceptions of Muslim women wearing a hijab or veil perceived differently?** Why or why not?
- **In what ways is Hawo contributing to Shelbyville?** What does she offer her neighbors and community in general (taxes, cultural diversity, purchases of goods, workforce, friendship, etc.)? What are the benefits to your community of supporting people like Hawo, when they arrive?
- When Mohamed Ali sits down with Brian Moseley, he explains: “If somebody discriminates against you, you can feel it because you are human.” **Consider a time when you or your ancestors were treated unfairly or discriminated against.** How would you apply lessons from that history to situations where others are being unfairly treated?
- Mayor Ray says that coming together is the only way to get to know one another and Hawo invites her new friends to her home for dinner. **Are there strangers in your town who you would like to meet?** What would you like to know about them and what would you like them to know about you?



Related Data

In many ways, the story of Shelbyville is similar to that of communities across the U.S. that are grappling with rapid demographic change. Use the data and research below in your post-screening discussion (or feature it on your website or materials) to help make broader connections between the story and these trends. You can find additional data in the Did You Know? documents on the various issue pages connected to the story.

Historical context. Immigrants and immigration have been a part of our national make-up and experience since our country’s earliest days. Hawo’s arrival corresponds with a fourth wave of large-scale immigration that began in the 1970s and continues today. The other three waves included: the peopling of the first colonies, westward expansion during the mid-19th century, and the rise of cities at the turn of the 20th

Refugees. Hawo is a refugee from Somalia. Refugees are people outside of their country who are unable or unwilling to return home because they fear serious harm.² Refugee status is a form of protection that may be granted to people who meet the definition and are of humanitarian concern to the U.S. This builds on a long held American value, that no matter where we were born, we are all entitled to the same basic respect

century.¹

Benefits of diversity. Research reported in the Scientific American has shown that diversity enhances creativity, leads to better decision making, and problem solving. Even simply being exposed to diversity can change the way you think.³

Southern Hospitality. For decades immigration heavily affected every region of the country *except* the South. It wasn't until after changes in immigration law in the 1980s, and the next wave of immigration in the 1990s, that Southern states became a leading destination for international newcomers ([Institute for Southern Studies](#)). Shelbyville, for example, is experiencing rapid demographic change; the foreign-born population in Tennessee has increased by 400% since 1990.

Demand for foreign workers. The availability of visas to enter and work in the U.S. through legal channels is severely limited and does not come close to meeting labor market demands. This is true for highly skilled workers⁴ and unskilled workers.⁵



and compassion.

Sending countries. The top origin countries for refugees are Afghanistan (2.6 million), Somalia (1.1 million), Iraq (746,200), Syria (729,000), Sudan (569,000), and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (509,300).⁶

Tax contributions. In the film, Hawo explains that she pays taxes, as many other immigrants do, including those without papers. One study found that undocumented workers pay \$162 billion annually in federal, state and local taxes. Another found the average immigrant paid \$1,800 *more* in taxes than government benefits received, generally in the form of income, Social Security and Medicare taxes, as well as sales taxes and property taxes when they rent or own homes.⁷

Adjusting our sails. Immigration is a source of economic vitality. Like wind in a sail, it propels us forward as a country. While immigration trends, along with other economic factors, have always affected workforce demographics differently from one community to the next, the overall impact of immigrants on the economy is positive. Between 1990 and 2004, increased immigration was correlated with increasing earnings of Americans by 0.7 percent and is expected to contribute to an increase of 1.8 percent over the long-term, according to a University of California, Davis study.

Suggested Bible Study Additions

Read the suggested passage and the text accompanying it. Watch the film as a group. Then use the Discussion prompts and reflection questions to make connections and ties between the scriptural stories and the film. Additional scriptural references are provided and can be used in the Opening and Closing Prayer.

Passages For Bible Study

Abraham and Sarah's Hospitality: Genesis 18: 1-15: The prophet Abraham is revered by Christianity, Islam and Judaism. In this passage, Abraham and Sarah provide a picture of exemplary hospitality and extravagant welcome to three strangers. Read the passage and discuss what stands out to you about this demonstration of hospitality. What does the scripture say to people of faith about how we are to treat the newcomer?

¹ Migration Policy Institute: migrationpolicy.org/article/immigration-united-states-new-economic-social-political-landscapes-legislative-reform

³ Scientific American: www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-diversity-makes-us-smarter/

⁴ American Immigration Council: immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/us-economy-still-needs-highly-skilled-foreign-workers

⁵ American Immigration Council: immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/employment-based-immigration-united-states-fact-sheet

⁶ Immigration Policy Center: www.immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/refugees-fact-sheet

⁷ Brookings: www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2010/09/01-immigration-west

The Road to Emmaus: Luke 24: 13-35: As two disciples walk to the town of Emmaus after Jesus' death, they are joined by a stranger, whom over the course of walking all day, they befriend, and invite to stay and eat with them in the evening time. To their surprise, in the "breaking of the bread" and sharing of the meal, they discover that the stranger, with whom they have been talking all along, is in fact, the resurrected Jesus. Discuss the power of the "breaking of the bread" in this passage, as well as the sharing of food and table fellowship in several scenes in the *Hawo's Dinner Party* film.

Additional Scriptural References

Exodus 23: 9: You shall not oppress a resident alien; you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.

Deuteronomy 10: 18-19: For the Lord your God ... executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Leviticus 19:33-34: When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.

Matthew 25:35-40: 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, 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...just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.

Hebrews 13:2: Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

For Further Reflection

What biblical character, scripture, or faith teaching does this film connect to for you? Please explain.

Our country and faith traditions value hard work, service, and compassion. How could our public systems reflect those values, so that people like Hawo and Mohammad Ali can live in dignity?

Christianity has a very clear call to welcome the newcomer with hospitality and fellowship. This runs directly counter to xenophobia and fear which often shows up in our culture and community. How might God be challenging you or your congregation to respond?

About ONWARD

ONWARD, a one-stop, web-based collection of curated films, video clips, audio stories, hot-off-the-press books, and journalism that tells a deeper story about immigration today. Each story is carefully paired with data, scriptural references, tips, and more to make it easy for anyone –anywhere—to use vivid media to increase support for an immigration system that works for all of us.