

# ONWARD

## DISCUSSION GUIDE: *The Mayor*



>> *The Mayor* is the second film in the Immigrant Nation short film series by Theo Rigby. 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 are most relevant to the kind of conversation you'd like to have.

### How to Use *The Mayor* to Spark Discussions About Immigration

*The Mayor* tells the story of Paul Bridges, the Republican Mayor of Uvalda, Georgia (population 594) who stands up for his town's mainly Latino immigrant community after Georgia adopts harsh anti-immigrant laws, making it criminal to drive or house undocumented people. The story can be used to humanize the issues and underscore the importance of welcoming newcomers, especially children. The short format makes it easy to use as a prompt at community events, meetings, book clubs, Bible studies and more. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- **Ask your church leader to incorporate it into their preaching and teaching** to raise awareness and reflection among members about the ways our lives are interconnected and interdependent with the lives of immigrants.
- **Spark interaction and dialogue** about what solutions can we start to think about to support immigrant youth and protect the sanctity and dignity of families?
- **Spark discussion and activities** among youth in your community, in the classroom, or at church, to deepen understanding about challenges that immigrant youth in your community face.
- **Co-host a screening with another congregation or group** that serves immigrants as a way to build relationships and brainstorm opportunities for collaboration and service.
- **Bring it to your youth group, women's fellowship, Bible study or share group** to connect your faith and scripture to real-life experiences.
- **Incorporate into your professional development** to train staff, orient volunteers to the issues and/or enhance cultural competency.
- **Embed it** into social media platforms and websites to paint a vivid picture of why the work you're doing to support immigrants and their families is needed.

## 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 *The Mayor* 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

- The economy in Uvalda is based on agriculture, but the labor is harsh, explains Mayor Bridges. He doesn't want to do it and he doesn't want his kids to do it. **How are labor conditions in your own community?** Do you—or does anyone in your family—hope to work alongside immigrants in comparable conditions? Why or why not?
- Mayor Bridges explains that it was 1999 before he had had any interaction with Latino's. Before then, he had the impression they were not quite "worthy." **Why do you think the opportunity to interact with Latino's changed his opinion?** What interactions have you had with people who are Latino/a?

- After he started to interact more with Latino’s in his community, Mayor Bridges recognized they were “family-- oriented, hard workers, with high morals.” This led him to realize they shared many values in common. In your opinion, **what factors get in the way of recognizing a shared humanity?**
- Mayor Bridges explains that he is a proud Republican, but he feels “conservative” has been redefined. “We should not be separating families,” he explains. So he joined a lawsuit against Georgia to stop HB87, which allows police to ask suspects about their immigration status. **Have you or others in your church or community been called to stand up for others** as the Mayor did? What motivated you, or them?
- Mayor Bridges his life is richer now. Mario became his best friend and Celeste thinks of him as a third parent. **In what ways do you see immigrants are enriching your life or benefiting your community?**
- Celeste is in the gifted classes, but early in the film she expresses worry about college because in Georgia, you have to have papers to go to college. **How might we lower the barriers so hard-working people like Mario and Celeste can participate more fully in our communities?** Please explain.
- With the help of Mayor Bridges, Celeste filled out her Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA, see next page) paperwork and was eventually approved. This means she can now drive and doesn’t have to worry about being stopped or deported to a country she doesn’t remember; she can go to college, and; openly about the fact that she was born in Mexico. **Consider your own life, how would it be different if you could not do these basic things?**



## Related Data

In many ways, Mayor Bridges and his relationship with Mario and Celeste represents the moral will of our society to treat all beings with the dignity and respect we all deserve. Use the data and research below in your post-screening discussion (or feature it on your website or materials) to help make broader connections like this to the story. You can also find additional data in the Immigrant Youth and Welcoming the Stranger Did You Know? documents, which live on the various issue pages connected to the story.

**Immigration is wind in our country’s sails:** the labor, skills, and ideas that move our country onward. Right now those sails—our policies—are poorly positioned. They are both inconsistent with our country’s highest moral values to treat all people with respect and dignity, and they are impractical. By adjusting our sails, we can harness the power of the 11.4 million unauthorized immigrants living in this country, 24% of them under 24<sup>1</sup>, and nurture their potential so they can more fully contribute to a shared and prosperous future.

**Southern Hospitality.** Immigration to the U.S. South is relatively new. It was not until after changes in immigration law in the 1980s, and the next wave of immigration in the 1990s, that the region became a leading destination for newcomers.<sup>2</sup> For example, Georgia, experienced an over 200% increase in foreign-born people from 1990-2000.<sup>3</sup> A practical approach to moving forward means understanding how communities experience demographic change. While for some it is exciting, for others change brings uncertainty and fear.

<sup>1</sup> Migration Policy Institute: [www.migrationpolicy.org/data/unauthorized-immigrant-population/state/US](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/unauthorized-immigrant-population/state/US)

<sup>2</sup> Institute for Southern Studies: [southernstudies.org/2014/05/lessons-from-the-souths-unique-history-of-immigrat.html](http://southernstudies.org/2014/05/lessons-from-the-souths-unique-history-of-immigrat.html)

<sup>3</sup> Migration Policy Institute: [www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/demographics/GA/](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/demographics/GA/)

**Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA):** This program launched in 2012—the expansion of which is indefinitely stalled due to a 2015 court injunction—has offered many undocumented immigrant youth temporary work authorization and a two-year reprieve from deportation. It makes it possible for undocumented youth like Celeste to study, work, and live in the U.S. temporarily with lawful status. About 2.1 million immigrants are eligible.<sup>4</sup> A survey of DACA beneficiaries<sup>5</sup> demonstrated that 60% of them obtained a new job and 45% increased their earnings.

**Community Safety.** A 2013 study showed that increased immigration enforcement by local police eroded trust in immigrant communities and made them significantly less likely to report a crime.<sup>6</sup> HB87, which Mayor Bridges fought against, is an example of this kind of enforcement policy. However, policies that promote trust between immigrants and authorities support safer communities.

**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.<sup>7</sup>

**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 workers<sup>8</sup> and unskilled workers.<sup>9</sup>

**Protection for workers.** 85% of undocumented immigrants who encountered problems with their working conditions in the prior 12 months of one study did not complain because they feared their immigration status would be used against them.<sup>10</sup> But some states have started passing bills to address this problem and treat workers with the compassion they deserve.<sup>11</sup>

## 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.

### Passage for Bible Study

Parable of the Good Samaritan: Luke 10:25-37 The biblical story of the Good Samaritan features the kindness, compassion and care provided by an unlikely hero. Samaritans were long considered “other” and outside the Jewish fold, and there was a long history of disdain and enmity between Samaritans and Jews. John 4:9 says, “Jews and Samaritans did not associate with each other.” And yet, it is the Samaritan, (not the Jewish priest or priest’s assistant (Levite), who comes to the aid of a Jew badly beaten and robbed. How does this parable connect to the film? How are Mario and Celeste, undocumented immigrants who are unwanted and “other” in Georgia, Good Samaritans to their community? How is Bridges a Good Samaritan to the immigrant community?

<sup>4</sup> Migration Policy Institute: [www.migrationpolicy.org/research/daca-two-year-mark-national-and-state-profile-youth-eligible-and-applying-deferred-action](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/daca-two-year-mark-national-and-state-profile-youth-eligible-and-applying-deferred-action)

<sup>5</sup> Brookings: [www.brookings.edu/blogs/the-avenue/posts/2014/11/19-daca-executive-action-immigration-singer](http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/the-avenue/posts/2014/11/19-daca-executive-action-immigration-singer)

<sup>6</sup> Policylink: [www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/INSECURE\\_COMMUNITIES\\_REPORT\\_FINAL.PDF](http://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/INSECURE_COMMUNITIES_REPORT_FINAL.PDF)

<sup>7</sup> Scientific American: [www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-diversity-makes-us-smarter/](http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-diversity-makes-us-smarter/)

<sup>8</sup> American Immigration Council: [immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/us-economy-still-needs-highly-skilled-foreign-workers](http://immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/us-economy-still-needs-highly-skilled-foreign-workers)

<sup>9</sup> American Immigration Council: [immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/employment-based-immigration-united-states-fact-sheet](http://immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/employment-based-immigration-united-states-fact-sheet)

<sup>10</sup> National Immigration Law Center: [www.nilc.org/pubs.html#statesessions](http://www.nilc.org/pubs.html#statesessions)

<sup>11</sup> Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration: [dornsife.usc.edu/assets/sites/731/docs/citizen\\_gain\\_web.pdf](http://dornsife.usc.edu/assets/sites/731/docs/citizen_gain_web.pdf)

Jesus tells this parable in response to two questions: What must I gain to attain eternal life? And who is my neighbor? What lessons do we draw from this parable today? Who is your neighbor? And what does it mean to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself” (v.27)?

### Additional Scriptural References

**Deuteronomy 10:18-19** – “For the Lord your God...loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”

**Psalms 146:9:** The Lord watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.

**Luke 10:27:** You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.

**I Corinthians 12:26:** If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

**Galatians 3: 28:** There are no more distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, but all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

### 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 Mario and Celeste can live in dignity?

How do you think God sees and supports Mario, Celeste, and Mayor Bridges? What does your faith call you to do in relation to supporting hardworking and compassionate people like them?

## 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.