
The year 2020 has been very difficult for many who are dealing with:

- The COVID-19 pandemic
- Events of police brutality
- Racial disparities and injustices against African Americans, Asians, Hispanics, and other ethnicities
- A stressful US election
- Closed borders and expansion of the US-Mexico wall

Despite these challenges, many people from Central and South America and from other parts of the world continue massive immigration to the United States and Canada in pursuit of a new life—fleeing violence and organized crime, the closing of churches, job loss, etc.

With this heartbreaking and gloomy outlook, it is difficult to see good news happening around us. Jesus’ response to John’s question, “Are You the Coming One or do we look for another?” was “Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them” (Luke 7:20, 22 NKJV).

This response pushes us to look around and explore events that are displaying life and hope in our congregations, families, communities, and countries. There is no doubt that God has brought, brings, and will continue to bring good news into our lives, which we must learn to share and shout out loudly to the world. In the midst of a heartbreaking panorama, God brings good news to us.

So, this week, I want to announce more good news. A pastor from one of our Mennonite Central Committee constituent churches came to our office disconsolately asking for help for four church members. Over the weekend, he had hosted these Christian brothers for a day of fishing. It was an opportunity to talk with them about various issues and have some fun together. At the end of the day, they were intercepted by a police patrol. The pastor presented his identification and the corresponding permits for his boat, but the four men were undocumented. They were reported to immigration and escorted to an immigration patrol.

The tearful pastor begged the officers to release them, but the four men were taken to a detention center. The pastor returned home heartbroken and informed the young men’s relatives. One brother was immediately deported to his country of origin; the other three remained at a detention center.

After a week or so, our immigration office managed to get them out of the detention center by paying their bonds. They received orders to appear before a judge. The whole church got involved, raising money to pay bail and help their families—walking with the brothers during the whole process.

Then the good news really began. The brother who had been deported was allowed to return because he was the victim of an assault and the case had been reported to the authorities prior to this arrest. He applied for a U-Visa (temporary immigration benefits for victims of qualifying criminal activity). The other three were granted relief by the immigration court and were able to get annual, renewable work permits. Eventually, two of them became permanent residents; the other two continue to renew their work permits every year and were granted Social Security numbers.
So, God’s good news came to us even during a heartbreaking panorama. Sometimes things are different from what we expected. In this case, the unconditional love of a congregation, pastor, and God guided their immigration processes. In the end, the arrest of these four men was good news, creating a way for them to work on their immigration status and extend their time in the United States.

- What have you seen in your community, church, family, and friends that brought hope to your life and to those less fortunate?

We must share the good news of these life experiences and testify that Jesus Christ is our Savior and Redeemer. May we Christians in 2021 be a symbol of hope and tell the good news of Jesus to all who suffer and are submerged in despair in our community of faith, neighborhoods, cities, workplaces, and nations.

—Andrew Bodden, AndrewBodden@mcc.org

Andrew Bodden, a Honduran native, serves as a program director for Mennonite Central Committee East Coast, providing leadership to the programs in New York, Philadelphia, Florida, Puerto Rico, and to the Young Adult, and Peace and Justice programs. He also connects with Anabaptist pastors and churches on the East Coast and in Puerto Rico. Andrew has worked in multicultural settings in Central and South America, Mexico, Dominican Republic, and the United States. He is an ordained minister in the Atlantic Coast Conference and serves as vice-chair of the Mennonite Mission Network board.

Looking for participant guide page numbers in the leader guide? The page numbers in the leader guide work for both guides.

Resources for this session

- Dramatic Reading, Luke 7:11-35 NRSV adapted