



Effective immigration reform has long confounded the U.S. government and most experts agree that the system is now urgently in need of reform. However, folks on the right and folks on the left disagree profoundly about the direction this reform should take, and Congress has been unable to pass a major immigration bill reforming the U.S. immigration system for more than three decades.

The combination of this partisan gridlock and the contradictory, ever-changing tangle of policies which shape the governance of the U.S.-Mexico border in lieu of systematic change, has led to wide and deep suffering for tens of thousands of people seeking safety and protection in our country. The border crises in 2019 and 2021 have led many Episcopalians to seek opportunities to help. Recalling the Biblical injunction to welcome the stranger and Jesus' own great commandment that we love each other as He has loved us, some travel to the border to offer assistance in person; others send financial or material aid to local organizations and ministries; and many advocate for federal immigration reform and asylum protections, and for state laws supporting immigrant integration.

Now, Episcopal Migration Ministries is offering a new way for Episcopalians to get involved in their own, local communities.

Neighbor to Neighbor is not a program so much as a network to welcome new Americans. Rooted in local communities across the States, and in real-time, incarnate relationships between neighbors, it connects newly arrived asylum seekers with a nearby Episcopal congregation for support, guidance and assistance.

Neighbor to Neighbor offers a structured discernment guide for any congregational team that thinks they might be interested in accompanying asylum seekers in their community, provides an eight-week course of training to all who choose it, and then facilitates intra-congregational communities of support for as long as a congregation remains in the network.

Here's how it works:

- 1. Congregations attend a Learning Event and then discern, learn, plan, and decide to join Neighbor to Neighbor.**
- 2. Lay led groups from Neighbor Congregations are trained in order that they can best accompany their newly arrived neighbors.**
- 3. Newcomer neighbors who are asylum seekers request assistance in their destination communities and are connected to local Neighbor Congregations for friendship, support, guidance and care.**
- 4. Neighbor Congregations are supported through regular group-work, listening and prayer as well as through ongoing trainings facilitated by Neighbor to Neighbor.**

If you would be interested in hearing more, or in hosting a Neighbor to Neighbor Learning Event for congregations in your diocese, please contact Lesley MacKellar, Province V Executive Board Member, at lesleymackellar@gmail.com or Cristina Rathbone, Missioner for Neighbor to Neighbor, at crathbone@episcopalnetworks.org.