



# The Reverend Stephan Twardowski

Welcoming the Stranger: Refugees and the  
German Church

The Reverend Stephan Twardowski is pastor of the Braunschweig/Clausthal-Zellerfeld United Methodist churches in the North Germany Annual Conference, where he leads ministries of welcome and advocacy with refugees in Germany. In 2011, Reverend Twardowski represented the denomination as a delegate and workshop facilitator at the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation of the World Council of Church.

## Session 5: Welcoming the Stranger: Refugees and the German Church

### Prepare for the Session

- Copy of “Invitation to Conversation”
- Recruit someone to read aloud the invitation.
- Pitch a tent (small/children’s tent is fine); surround with empty water jugs.
- White strips of paper (that can be taped around a person’s wrist)
- Markers (assorted colors)
- Scotch tape
- Construction paper
- Make copies of the four questions/topics (one per page) to be used in the mini-discussion groups
- A notebook or paper for capturing words, thoughts, ideas on paper (optional)
- “Listening and Looking Guide” (make a copy for each participant)

### Getting Started (10 minutes)

As participants gather, ask each one to make a paper bracelet for her or his wrist with the word welcome on it. If persons know “welcome” in more than one language, encourage them to use that language on their bracelet.

Ask someone to read aloud the Invitation to Conversation. Then read aloud the scripture Matthew 25:34–40. Have a time for prayer—can be a private moment or someone can lead the group in prayer.

Introduce the session by saying that the video issues a call for churches to develop action plans that will create peace and justice, particularly in consideration of concerns and challenges of immigrations and refugees.

### Distribute the Listening and Looking Guide

Ask persons to review the guide in order to familiarize themselves with the questions and statements as a way of opening themselves to Reverend Twardowski’s presentation.

#### Before watching the video, ask everyone to respond to the first question:

- When you hear the words *immigration* or *refugees*, what comes to mind?

### Play the Video (15 minutes)

After the video is finished, provide time for the participants to add additional notes to their Listening and Looking Guide.

### Create Four Mini-discussion Groups (10–15 minutes)

Have participants work in teams (3–4 persons preferred). First, ask them to connect with the video by showing their wrist bracelets and say briefly how their bracelets might connect to a community campaign. Also, encourage participants to “swap biographies” by naming three things they like for people to know about them (i.e., something they value or have passion for). Note that this exercise was highlighted in the video.

#### Next, assign one of the following topics/questions to each group:

1. Reverend Twardowski said that this is the largest refugee crisis facing the world since World War II. He said there are 60 million refugees and 50 percent of them are under the age of eighteen.
  - a. Identify other things shared in the video about children/youth.
  - b. Make a list of eight to ten things that must be done to help children and youth grow and thrive despite their refugee status.
2. The presenter also posed an “agonizing” question: How open can our borders be? Can Germany be a place of refuge?
  - a. Draw comparisons between Germany’s challenges and discussions about immigrant reform in the United States (list at least 5 items)
  - b. What are our hallelujah moments? List examples of joyful acceptance of refugees from recent and past history.
3. The backlash: voices that promote hatred are getting louder, citing that housing being built for refugees was set afire.
  - a. Name the horror: reflect on the news or community experiences; where do you see grave harm being done?
  - b. Who are or where are the voices that are promoting hatred—list ways in which those voices might be challenged, those places changed.