



## VUSA RESOURCE ON IMMIGRATION 2026

*(revised from last year)*

Vineyard USA wants every church to be equipped to love the stranger amongst us, regardless of their legal status. Scripture instructs us this way: *The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God. (Leviticus 19:34)*. This command is not meant to insert us into partisan politics; however, God's commands often mean we will have to wisely engage political systems in our attempts to obey Jesus. After a year of intensified rhetoric and enforcement around immigration, one of the strongest needs for the Church is to act and speak in love. Love looks like something regardless of one's politics. Love does not condone violence of fist, tongue, or heart. Love casts out fear and calls forth peace. Love is for every single person in a conflict, not one side or the other. Love moves us urgently towards anyone who is weak, oppressed, and marginalized. Love does not demand agreement, but it seeks understanding.

Looking at our national landscape, we need more love when it comes to immigration in our country. While putting this into practice will mean different things to different congregations, VineyardUSA wants to equip and resource churches in light of new and unfolding immigration policies across our nation. Some of this resource will feel intensely pastoral or intensely practical. Both aspects are necessary as we seek God for a kind of love we can give away.

This encouragement and resource document will have a few components:

First, there are several pastoral thoughts for us as pastors and leaders and for our community.

1. [Why are we sending something like this now?](#)
2. [How do we pray and lead?](#)
3. [How do we support vulnerable families in our community?](#)

Second, there are practical thoughts to equip the vulnerable amongst us.

4. [What do you do if a congregant is approached or arrested by ICE?](#)
5. [What do you do if ICE comes to your church?](#)

At the end of the document, there is a [final charge](#) to pursue God's Kingdom through it all.

## 1. WHY NOW?

Recent excesses in immigration enforcement campaigns and a high-profile anti-ICE protest in a church have stoked fears of turmoil and violence happening in our very churches. This is not localized to one specific city or region. Throughout the country, people are realizing that immigration enforcement can greatly impact their own city or town. While this wondering can create further polarization, fear, and division, this resource aims to equip Vineyard pastors and leaders to care practically for immigrants in their congregations. Many report that immigrants are worshipping from home out of fear. While this is not new globally or historically, it is new for most of our congregations in America. In the past, under various ideologically divergent administrations, churches have been considered “sensitive” locations that are generally off-limits to immigration enforcement authorities. Exceptions were rare and usually limited to highly-targeted situations or people. In early 2025, that changed. Now, congregations across America face the potential scenario of federal agents entering churches to arrest migrants. This scenario has driven many not to come to church at all.

Churches are now asking questions about safety and care for immigrants and all people in their congregations. They are also asking how to respond when an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) action results in the arrest of someone involved in their congregation, and how to engage ICE if an agent comes to their church during a service. Our hope for this resource document is to unpack what this fast-evolving topic entails and how a church can respond legally, faithfully, and boldly with wisdom as they seek to pursue God’s Kingdom. As we do that, it is important to note that this document is not legal advice and that any action plan should be examined and approved by legal counsel. Another hope is simply to equip the church to pray and to lead in these challenging times even if a concrete policy has not been implemented. In an era where some immigrants are avoiding our buildings altogether, more than policies are needed. We need to ask God for His compassion, direction, and leadership to help immigrants know God’s love in a time of fear.

## 2. HOW DO WE PRAY AND LEAD?

There is room for us to disagree on much here, but still be united in loving the foreigner amongst us. Just like Vineyard USA as a whole, your congregations will not be looking to be in complete agreement regarding the immigration policy of the United States. Rather, people cry out for a simple next step of wisdom, courage, and love. That is what Jesus is calling us to, and we must answer the call of Jesus.

While there is much to pray for – ICE, law enforcement, immigrants, protestors, politicians, neighbors, congregants, we must start with lament. Lament that people have been killed. Lament that people have been demonized and vilified. Lament that families have been separated. Lament that people are afraid. Scripture says that “the Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves those crushed in spirit.” (Psalm 34:18). We need the Lord’s nearness, and it begins with sincere prayers of lament that cry out for God. Lord, send your mercy.

Come, Holy Spirit. Guide us with wisdom, courage, and love. Keep us faithful when political winds could divide and distract us. Help us love the ICE agent and the immigrant alike and guide us practically in how to do that with our leaders, congregations, the vulnerable in our congregations, and the vulnerable outside our doors. Jesus, be our shepherd in these trying times. Lead us and make a way for your Kingdom to come.

### **3. HOW DO WE SUPPORT VULNERABLE FAMILIES IN OUR COMMUNITIES?**

Invite people who are afraid to seek pastoral care. Get practical: write down relevant information, and encourage people to make a copy of important immigration details like their A-number\*, personal contact information, whether or not they have an existing removal order, etc. Some may find it helpful to provide copies to family members in the event a person is unable to access their own copies.

*\*A unique seven-, eight-, or nine-digit number assigned to certain noncitizens by the Department of Homeland Security.*

Encourage vulnerable people in your community to create an emergency preparedness plan. This should include emergency contacts, authorized pickups of children and other minors in their care, and standby guardianship forms. This is especially relevant in mixed-status families where parents might be detained and/or deported, but children would stay in the country. In addition to guardianship forms, make plans for who in your congregation could host children in the event that parents are detained or deported. Consider consulting with a local attorney and local advocacy groups for help with forms and resources.

Create spaces of lament and encourage people to cry out regardless of their “position” on immigration. For the sake of the most vulnerable amongst your congregation, frame recent increased immigration enforcement as an opportunity to have compassion on vulnerable people in your midst. Boldly name vulnerable groups and pray for their well-being and wholeness even if it seems like those groups are against one another. Prayer can bring groups together that our culture would otherwise separate. This is the Kingdom way.

The rhetoric of immigration is often heated. It can also lead to language that is dehumanizing for immigrants and law enforcement alike. Encourage people to be curious and compassionate when having conversations about this issue.

Foster creative Kingdom engagement with immigrants and law enforcement in your congregation. These unlikely bonds are a testament to the power of the Gospel and help build the kind of empathy and goodwill capable of restoring trust in public safety. These are opportunities to connect, not

debate. Always leave room for people to opt out based on safety concerns, and pay attention to recognize the signs of increased agitation and danger.

Connect with organizations that have already mobilized people in the community to serve immigrants. Pray for them and prayerfully seek opportunities to be a pastoral resource to community advocates, many of whom do not have spiritual resources and struggle with burnout. Be bold to share the Gospel, to pray with them, and to offer spiritual formation resources.

Connect with local law enforcement to ask questions about how their department can support your church in case of a disturbance in your building. Ask how you can pray for their department, given rising tensions.

Consider offering a ride and delivery ministry for those who feel scared to travel by themselves. In a time of fear and distance, be the hands and feet of Christ.

Neighbor well. Encourage your congregation to get to know their neighbors. In an era of prolonged and even mandatory detention of immigrants, local community networks are the best resource available to families experiencing detention or forced separation. Local neighboring is also a great frontline to de-escalate tensions if a crisis comes to your city.

Connect congregants with local resources and refer as needed, especially for more spiritual care, counseling, and mental health resources. Whether or not ICE comes to your church or impacts vulnerable people in your congregation, this is a time of fear for many. Perhaps, some who are afraid will surprise you. Invite the presence of God to come alongside these families and ask for God's peace.

#### **4. WHAT IF A CONGREGANT IS APPROACHED OR ARRESTED BY ICE?**

Make sure that vulnerable people in your congregation know their rights, as undocumented people also have rights through the United States Constitution. Practices might include staying silent at any time and not opening one's door without a warrant signed by a federal judge.<sup>1</sup> Letting people know about these rights is a form of keeping your community safe and empowering them. As laws change and more rights are challenged, remember that immigrants knowing they are loved might be the most powerful thing one can share at this time. Always include that simple Gospel truth with any advice you might give. And be sure not to give advice beyond your own scope of expertise, as doing so may cause further harm and escalate tension.

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<sup>1</sup> Be aware that several longstanding protections for immigrants are now shifting through new legal reinterpretations. The scope of government authority to make arrests on the basis of an administrative warrant alone is actively being challenged and reviewed. This document is not legal advice so please consult qualified legal support before enacting local church policies given the fast moving nature of immigration law currently.

Encourage at-risk congregants to seek legal counsel before an encounter with ICE. Encourage them not to agree to or sign anything without first consulting with an attorney. Also, encourage people not to lie, run, or resist. As Kingdom people, we honor God's truth, and we speak God's truth even when there are consequences. Every noncitizen has the right to remain silent, but if they do speak, they should avoid providing false information, as lying only makes immigration matters worse. Do not encourage anyone to flee from an officer, as consequences only increase and chases endanger others.

Encourage people to have emergency contacts, personal information, proof of any pending or approved applications for immigration benefits, and their immigration history handy. All of this makes it easier to coordinate next steps if detained. If no A-number has been assigned previously, ICE will assign one when the person is detained and/or placed into removal proceedings. Encourage people to record that number and share it with emergency contacts. You can use an [ICE detainee locator](#) and an [Executive Office for Immigration Review \(EOIR\) case status page](#) to track congregants' whereabouts and case information as you seek to care for them and their families.

## 5. WHAT TO DO IF ICE COMES TO YOUR CHURCH?

Under the rules of the current administration, ICE officers are now explicitly allowed to enter "sensitive locations" such as churches, schools, medical clinics, hospitals, and domestic violence shelters that were previously off-limits for immigration enforcement activities. This authority to conduct arrests does not erase standards for those arrests to be lawful, but as we have seen, there are times when arrests appear to violate constitutional protections. Recent excesses have included excessive force and even the mistaken arrests of U.S. citizens. As churches, we can be a steady, prayerful resource to lower the temperature and to be a presence of peace.

As always, as Christ-following pastors and leaders, we are subject ultimately to the authority of Christ. Given the current policies, there is an invitation for pastors and leaders to discern how to interact with ICE. More than "peaceful", these interactions must be nonviolent - free of violence of fist, tongue, and heart. That is the Kingdom standard. Currently, it is unclear how constitutional protections for freedom to practice our religion would shield a church from consequences or liabilities. Some of these questions are actively being litigated in federal court lawsuits brought by different denominations around the country. Still, the Church can model a loving and dignifying posture towards ICE *and* immigrants as a witness of the Gospel for the common good.

If ICE comes to your church for an enforcement action, have a point person designated to interact with arresting officers. Stay calm, and keep the tone as respectful as possible. Ask if they have a judicial warrant, and ask to see it to ensure that it is signed by a judge. You may want to consider designating certain spaces within the church as private and marking those spaces with a sign.

Keep in mind that the law is quickly evolving. ICE has been seeking to expand its authority to make arrests with an administrative - not judicial - warrant alone. There are also laws that criminalize sheltering or harboring people from federal law enforcement officers, and even actions designed to keep congregants safe could lead to liability. Consult with an attorney before finalizing policies and plans to ensure that any steps taken are consistent with federal law and thoughtfully weigh the risk of potential liability under current law.

Even with it being unclear how constitutional protections for freedom to practice our religion apply to immigration work, we, as the Church, can and must care for the immigrant as a witness to Jesus Christ and his coming Kingdom. Our faith testifies to the power of making strangers into family. This is not only an outward practice we do with the immigrant. It is God's practice towards us – people once far from God and excluded from heavenly citizenship.

## **6. FINAL CHARGE**

The Letter to Ephesians puts it this way: Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ (Ephesians 2:12-13). More than anything, we want to see people brought near to Jesus. We need abundant wisdom to see how to do that in our current climate. While Vineyard churches may understandably disagree about methods to care for immigrants amongst us, we must obey God's call to love the stranger. After all, we were once strangers to God ourselves.

Come, Holy Spirit. Give us wisdom. Give us courage. Give us your Love.