



Sarah Schulz

Called to Welcome Refugees

Video (11:08): Sarah Schulz, United Methodist theologian, licensed minister and education consultant for United Methodist Church in Germany

Sarah Schulz is a United Methodist preacher and theologian who serves as the education secretary for The United Methodist Church in Germany. Her primary work is helping congregations learn to welcome and advocate for refugees and immigrant persons. She urges the church to remember the most basic and most important part of our Christian belief: To love God and to love our fellow human beings and to care about them just as we do ourselves.

Called to Welcome Refugees

Preparation

Select a room or location to offer the study. Every session needs a room that has the capability to access the video via the Internet and to project the video for groups of various sizes. Check to be sure the equipment is working properly. *This video can be found at www.gcorr.org/series/vc3.*

Preview the video. Read through the lesson plan. Have for display or sharing a covenant of care for the session. Think about asking members in the session to read the Scriptures.

Do some research about topics such as welcoming refugees in the United States and Germany (welcomingrefugees.org; america.aljazeera.com); protests against establishing shelters and transition homes for veterans, released prisoners, and homeless persons in certain neighborhoods. In addition to online news articles, refer to United Methodist Church publications such as *Response* magazine (<http://unitedmethodistwomen.org/response>), and websites of other agencies, General Board of Church and Society (<http://umc-gbcs.org>),

General Board of Global Ministries (<http://umcmmission.org>), United Methodist Women (<http://unitedmethodistwomen.org>), and United Methodist Committee on Relief (<http://umcor.org>). Download or purchase a map of Germany to post in your meeting room and point out or outline the places where Sarah Schulz has lived.

Gather the following materials:

- Bible for reading the Scriptures – Ruth 1; Matthew 25:31-40; and James 1:5 (included)
- Listening and Looking Guide (one for each person or project on a screen)
- Construction paper, assorted colors – two sheets for each person
- Pens, pencils, and markers, assorted colors
- Trash can or small laundry basket

THE STUDY SESSION

Get Started [20 minutes]

Welcome everyone to the session; take care of housekeeping matters. Read aloud the following statement of purpose (or recruit a volunteer to do so): “The General Commission on Religion and Race presents *Vital Conversations* to help start the dialogue on subjects that may sometimes be difficult to approach. We are all part of the beloved community, and we welcome perspectives that bring enlightenment and understanding.”

Begin the study session by distributing markers and construction paper and ask participants to sketch a picture of a journey in their lives (i.e., leaving home to go to college; establishing residence for a new job; achieving a dream vacation). The “sketch” may be a timeline, a series of pictures, or a cluster of words. Have each person introduce themselves by sharing their journey briefly. (Manage the time process, allowing each one a maximum of two minutes to describe their journey.)

Introduce yourself last and describe your journey.

Then explain why you accepted the role of facilitator for this session and your vision for the time together. Introduce the video presenter:

Sarah Schulz, a theologian and licensed minister, works as an education secretary in The United Methodist Church in Germany. Upon finishing her studies in theology, she moved from Berlin to Saxony to work in ministry there. She calls the church to take its mission seriously and welcome the stranger and embrace the newcomer, specifically refugees and immigrants.

Ask someone to read aloud these Scriptures: Ruth 1 and Matthew 25:31-40. Invite someone to lead the group in prayer; if no one volunteers, open with a prayer of your choice.

Read and post the group covenant and highlight the key components: confidentiality; everyone’s voice matters; disagree with care and do not attack anyone. Invite the group to add thoughts and ideas to the covenant.

Distribute the Listening and Looking Guide.

Explain that this is a resource to help them capture thoughts and ideas from the video presentation as well as a place to make note of visions they have for ministry. Allow time for them to scan the questions to help focus the viewing and listening process.

Play the Video [20 minutes]

Encourage participants to jot down short notes on their guide but as much as possible remain attentive to listening to and experiencing the presentation. At the conclusion of the video, allow five to ten minutes for the group to add more information and answer questions on their Listening and Looking Guide. Tell the group that there will be opportunities to add more information to the sheet and to reflect upon their notes. (If time permits, ask the group if they want to see the video again.)

Share Research and Experiences [10-15 minutes]

Give an overview of information that you have found about the challenges some communities have faced in welcoming refugees or others who might be thought of as strangers (homeless, veterans, etc.). Ask the group if any of them has had firsthand experience with these challenges. Allow one or two persons to add information.

Encounter Spaces [20-25 minutes]

Ms. Schulz calls for the church to create “encounter” spaces to help break the circle of xenophobia and fear of the stranger, the refugee, and the unknown. She talks specifically about having language exchange sessions, joint cooking events, and sports tournaments.

Divide the group into mini-circles of three to five persons (try to keep it an odd number). Invite each person to describe a setting in which she or he was a newcomer and to identify people and experiences that helped make them welcome. (Ask the group to dig deep into their memory banks and think of new settings in their lives, i.e., going to college; marrying into a family; serving on a volunteer in mission team in another state or country; changing jobs.) Allow each person up to three minutes to share their story. (Try to be strict in timekeeping.)

Litany: Naming the “Crazy Thing” [5 minutes]

In the beginning of the video, Ms. Schulz describes the actions of radical right-wing groups in her native Germany using discriminating slogans that show “utter contempt for human life.” She says, “The crazy thing is that those parties claim to advocate Christian values.”

Lead the group in a litany-type reflection by asking for volunteers to name the “crazy thing” that they have recently witnessed in their communities in response to a social justice issue, a “crazy thing” that runs contrary to their understanding of Christian values. Any person who desires to speak gets ONE MINUTE to rant or lament against the craziness – to speak sorrow, frustration or anger without judgment. Ask others in the group to listen in silence as much as possible.

At the conclusion of each person’s “rant,” lead the group in acknowledging the pain and frustration by simply saying, “Lord, have mercy.” Call for a group response by saying: “And the people say...”

Casting Out Fear [10 minutes]

Sarah Schulz names two fears that are prevalent in the community where she lives: fear of everything foreign and strange and fear of falling by the wayside. Distribute sheets of paper and markers. Ask each person to write on the paper a true fear that they have – it could be for their lives, for their family, for their church, for the world.

Set out a basket or trash can about eight feet away from the group. Invite persons one at a time to come up (stand or sit) and cast their fear in the wastebasket. Persons may make a statement about their fear or throw their paper in silence. Leave the papers wherever they land.

After everyone who desires to speak has done so, go stand close to the “fears” and share this prayer: Our Lord and Savior, You asked us to cast all our fears upon You because You care for us. We cast out the fears in our lives, in our communities that keep us from being the beloved community that You call us to be. Hear our prayers, have mercy upon us. AMEN.

Reflect and Share [10 minutes]

Have members review the information recorded on their guide sheet. Add additional thoughts, complete their vision, their commitment, and begin to draft their social media “shares.” Invite anyone who wishes to share their commitment to do so after a time of individual reflection.

Closing Prayer [1 minute]

We began our time talking about journeys and changes in our lives. We listened to Sarah Schulz talk about her journey. Let us conclude with this scriptural reminder as we journey through what may be challenging and turbulent times in welcoming refugees. James 1:5 (The Voice), reads: “If you don’t have all the wisdom needed for this journey, then all you have to do is ask God for it; and God will grant all that you need. He gives lavishly and never scolds you for asking.”

Let us ask and believe as we hear this prayer:

God, bless the work of people like Sarah Schulz, people who work day and night to live the Christian values outlined in Matthew 25. Help us to see You hungry and thirsty in the faces of all we meet – and respond. Help us see the strangers and offer them welcome. Bless our journey and strengthen the work of our hands; Lord, strengthen the work of our hands. Amen.

Listening & Looking Guide: Sarah Schulz

Reflection: In what way(s) do you see a link between Sarah's experiences in Germany and yours in the United States or your country of birth? _____

Remember a time when you formed a group to address a perceived challenge (as did people in Sarah's hometown): _____

Recall the positive effects to her town as a result of refugees being placed there (i.e., abandoned flats restored): _____

She describes two kinds of fear –identify them: _____

What are your fears or concerns about issues of immigration and refugee resettlement? _____

Cultivate a new vision: Sarah Schulz asks of us to create spaces for people to meet. She says: "We have rooms where meetings could take place." Identify spaces and places where you live that could be used to build community for refugees: _____

Make a commitment: Ms. Schulz talks about the need for churches to take on a second big task to disable biases and lies (i.e., false assertions that refugees are getting huge amount of money while other local people in need are being ignored). What bias will you work to reverse? _____

Make a commitment: _____

Tweet This/Post on your social media: _____

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