

Welcoming The Stranger To St. Louis: Religious Responses To Recent Immigrants And Refugees

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Speakers: Anna Crosslin, Marie Griffith, Rori Picker Neiss, Javier Orozco, Eldin Susa

Prof. Marie Griffith:

Good evening, everyone. I'm Marie Griffith. I'm the Director of the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics and we are delighted to welcome you this evening to this program on *Welcoming The Stranger To St. Louis: Religious Responses To Recent Immigrants And Refugees*. And, while I want to think that every program that we do is special in some way, this one truly speaks to urgent issues in our own time. As federal government officials battle over America's immigration and refugee policies in ways that many of us find frightening. Harking back more to the draconian immigration law passed in 1924, the Johnson Redact, many of you know, targeted specific ethnic populations, largely Italians, Eastern European Jews, and persons from all across Asia. Then the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which removed the emphasis on race altogether and instead, emphasized family reunification and skilled workers. And although St. Louis is neither a port city nor a border town, it's been a home for immigrants and refugees for many decades. So, we're so glad to have this opportunity tonight to learn more about this part of our region's history and the present really good work being done by the International Institute of St. Louis as well as religious congregations and organizations. So, our format for this evening is this, our first speaker, Anna Crosslin, will discuss the work of the International Institute of St. Louis and following her remarks, a panel of both religious leaders will discuss the actions their communities are pursuing to serve immigrants and refugees in the St. Louis area, so I'll introduce them before they come up and we'll have ample time for discussion and Q&A after that. Anna Crosslin is the president and CEO of the International Institute of St. Louis, our region's welcome center for new Americans. She has led the International Institute since 1978. The institute offers a wide array of integrative services to more than 7,000 immigrants from 80 countries nationally. It is widely respected for its English and citizenship preparation, workforce development and career cap services, small business development, and therapeutic counseling services. And some of you may also know its annual festival of nations draws more than 100,000 visitors annually. In 2012, Anna served as a co-founder of the St. Louis Mosaic project, where she continues to serve on the steering committee. Mosaic is a nationally recognized immigration attraction initiative which engages city and county officials, corporate higher education, and immigrant integration leaders in building a more welcoming and inclusive St. Louis to benefit all residents. Anna is the recipient of numerous awards and recognitions. I'm not gonna read all of them here, but since 2000, she has routinely been identified as one of the St. Louis Business Journal's most influential St. Louisans, including awards for minority and women's leadership. And in 2016, she was the recipient of the prestigious St. Louis Award, established in 1931 by David Wohl, the award is given annually to a St. Louis resident who has brought greatest honor to the community. She's also a past recipient of leadership awards from many organizations, serves as the board member of the St. Louis regional chapter, chair of the board at the national Asian Pacific Center for Aging in Seattle, and as a gubernatorial appointee to the Missouri

commission on human rights. In June 2015, she was recognized as a White House champion of change for world refugee day. Anna's been awarded two honorary doctorates, one from Webster and one right here at Washington University, which is also her alma mater. So, please join me in welcoming Anna Crosslin.

[Audience claps]

Anna Crosslin:

So, we can have...there's seating over on this side. Seating over on this side...we'll pause for a moment and let people get seated. Good evening.

Audience:

Good evening.

Crosslin:

You know, today we find ourselves living in a climate of overt hostility toward the other. This is not new. You heard Marie, in fact, a moment ago mention a little bit about it. Americans have indeed been virulently anti-immigrant, anti-other. For instance, the term nativism was first used in 1844, gaining its name from Native American, and the parties of the 1840s and 1850s. In this context though native doesn't mean indigenous Americans, or American Indians, but rather those who descended from the inhabitants of the original thirteen colonies. Nativists especially objected to Irish Roman Catholics because they questioned their loyalty, which they felt was primarily to the pope. Most newcomers were hated and feared by those who had settled as little as a generation earlier. The claim was that most immigrants have no gene for democracy. They were too racially different and could not assimilate. Nativist movements included the know-nothing party of the 1850s, the immigrant restriction league of the 1890s, and a variety of anti-Asian movements. Americans feared being overwhelmed with people who weren't like them. That sound familiar? Maybe we're hearing it today again. At the turn of the twentieth century, the young women's Christian association, the YWCA, stepped into this environment. Its national board recognized the need for specialized services for foreign born. So, they created a department of immigrant and foreign communities to oversee field offices in projects called international institutes. Jane Addams, with Hull House in Chicago, created a model for meeting immigrant needs. It was located in an immigrant neighborhood, provided social and humanitarian services, talking course, and created opportunities for cultural growth and expression. Edith Terry Brimmer, learning from this model, launched the first International Institute in New York City in 1911. St. Louis opened in 1919. By 1925, there were 55 International Institutes. Primarily located in the industrial Northeast, the Midwest, and in California, which already led the nation in immigrant population, with 52 percent of Californians being immigrants or their children. In the early years of the international institute movement, as it was called, three things coalesced to become its driving principles. They endure today.

Promoting ethnic identity and leadership, being inclusive, and teaching democracy and self-reliance. In spite of such initiatives, public and political fervor finally boiled over, resulting in the passage of the Immigration Act of 1924. The act set a total immigration quota for...at 165,000 people for countries outside the western hemisphere. That was an eighty percent reduction from pre-WWI numbers. Quotas for specific countries were based on two percent of the US population that the country had recorded as admissions in 1890...important to remember that. So, populations poorly represented in 1890 were prevented from immigrating in proportionate numbers, especially Italians and Jews, and all Asians were banned. The result of the act was a twenty-year period of isolation with large scale immigration to the United States and for all but a few western Europeans. That situation didn't begin to ease until after WWII, and eventually, more dramatically, with the passages of the Immigration Act of 1965, and the Refugee Act of 1980. So, America's immigrant history has always been a struggle of newcomer and long timer. With each new group it begins with a conflict due to perceived differences. It only eases when people find common ground in their shared values and beliefs. The current political and social environments have added new twists to the immigrant and refugee integration process. In addition to anti-immigrant hostility, immigrants and refugees face societal challenges including the demographics of St. Louis. We're an aging population; we're older and whiter the rest of the nation; to welcome people who don't look like us is harder as we've always lived around people who in fact look just like other St. Louisans. We have a smaller foreign-born population relative to similar cities. St. Louis, 6.7 percent of the population is foreign born compared to 33% in New York City, 24% in Chicago; the city of Los Angeles, 80% foreign born. You look at the twenty cities ahead of us on the MSA as this point and all twenty of those cities reflect three to four times the percentage of foreign born that we have here in St. Louis...important to remember that. Also, we have a sharply increasing racial and economic set of inequalities. Rich and poor, white and black, real real conflicts here in St. Louis and a great need. Also, the admissions of individuals, refugees from abroad, and the individuals have changed in terms of background and religion. We have far more individual staff who are coming from Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, and other non-Christian faiths and that also has impacted on sentiments, welcoming sentiments toward these individuals. In addition, the foreign born themselves are challenged by widely varying needs including language, do they speak English or not? How well do they speak English? Culture. Education. Skills. Experience...job experience. Have they in fact spent decades in refugee camps somewhere waiting to be able to be admitted to a country of asylum including the United States. Age. Sometimes they're very young; sometimes they're very old and being able to start over again and be self-sufficient. When people get to be my age, it's harder. There's no question, it's harder. And health and trauma, particularly for the refugee populations. Remaining in a refugee camp for a long period of time can be a debilitating experience. You can actually enter a refugee camp more healthy than you leave it. And on legal status. When we look up at issues of challenge in this country with the foreign born, you cannot avoid the fact that legal status has a big impact on ability to be able to successfully resettle over here. So, efforts...they must be wider in terms of addressing the needs of not just of the foreign-born population, we have to look at issues that face the foreign-born population in the context of the wider community and their needs as well. And if our desire is to create a welcoming community for immigrants and new comers, then we have to address the needs of all people in

the community, foreign born and native born alike. I want to thank our faith-based collaborators, some of whom are speaking this evening. I'm really proud to be associated with them and the literally hundreds of faith-based institutions and members who are working to help create that welcoming community that's so vital to our region's success. And now, in this context, I'd like to offer a quick birds eye view of the international institute and a few of the ways in which we have recently collaborated with faith organizations to be able to do the work of welcoming the stranger, but I won't go into great detail about the actual events as I don't want to steal the thunder of the individuals who are going to be speaking in a few minutes. But, let me first of all, primarily, have any of you visited the International Institute before? Oh my God. Look at all these hands. Have you visited the International Institute since we moved into the former St. Elizabeth Academy? Oh, a few there, too. Great. Um, we relocated in 2015 to the former...this side of the former St. Elizabeth Academy, at the 3400 block of Arsenal in South City. And for some of you who may not know, it was for more than 100 years the uh...the site of...bordered the Most Precious Blood, which is a teaching order here in St. Louis of their school, where they educated immigrant girls. And so one of things they said to us when we bought the building in the back into it, was they felt like it was really a full circle at that point because 100 years ago, they were immigrated and were educating immigrant young girls, and today immigrant girls and boys are actually able to learn at the International Institute again. But I'm gonna go fairly quickly through this and so if you have any questions about any of the services, slides, things that you see, then certainly during the Q&A we can discuss in more detail. But, the let's see....[muffled speaking regarding technology malfunction]. Technology....you know, I regard myself as relatively sophisticated with technology and still I don't have a clue. I used have to ask my four-year-old daughter at the time how to be able to load something. But anyway...The International Institute on an annual basis serves about 7,000 people from uh, from about 100 countries. It's an incredibly diverse population. One of the things to remember about St. Louis, while we don't have lots of numbers of immigrants at this point, we have a very diverse population; I sometimes say we're as diverse as Chicago. The difference is in Chicago they might have thousands of a certain population of a certain country; here, we might have a handful, but it's a very diverse population. Well...one of the things we do is we are the largest English as a second language site in the state and so we offer morning, afternoon, and evening classes for about 1,200 people a year. Our refugee resettlement program, until two years ago, was really pretty large; we were resettling about one percent of the refugees resettled in the United States, but the travel bans last year and continuing tampering down by the administration, the federal administration, with regards to refugee resettlement resulted in a drop here in St. Louis. The refugee resettlement from 2016 of 1,158 refugees to 181 refugees last year. One of the things that we work very hard at doing but never can do enough of is providing community orientation for the newcomers. Imagine, imagine what it must be like if you come from where you didn't have a clue what a parking meter is, or how to use an atm machine, etc. This is all new to everybody and so we have to start over from square one with most of them and that's an area in which we very much rely on volunteers to be able to assist us. Another thing that we try to do is be able to help them understand the community in which they moved to this point so that they can have the opportunity to really have some enriching experiences especially as a family, as a family. And so, this is a visit to the art museum, and a discussion. That's one of my staff there who's talking

about Missouri, Missouri art and history. This is a summer program that's been operated at the International Institute the last two summers, with really active involvement in sponsorship this last year, from the Jewish Community, and the Jewish Community Relations Council. I won't talk about it a lot because I suspect it will come up later. But here is our after-school program that we just started providing last year.

It ran parallel to our summer camp program over the summer, and then we had enrollment in the fall. I just looked at the numbers in fact for a report today, and in the fall session of the twenty people who got through and filled out all the paperwork, eighteen of the twenty increased at least one grade in one of their classes. But what was incredible but all the way down to twenty-five percent of them increased one grade in four of their classes. So the impact of this program for people who in some cases have never been in classes before is incredible. These are graduates of something called CAIP, which is Career Access for International Professionals. Three of these individuals are engineers, there's also a chemist, and I forgot what the fifth one is. But these are professionals who come over here with a lot of skills that are really beneficial to St. Louis if we could just figure out how to get them recertified and help them to learn networking and how to get into the American work system. So that's what CAIP and our career pathways services are all about.

For those who don't go on to higher education but have a really good idea and want to be an entrepreneur, we have what we call a microlending program, where we give loans to individuals who are not yet bankable but have a really good idea in terms of how they want to be able to start over in the community as an entrepreneur. In this case this is the brother of an owner, a Syrian family who arrived here in 2012, seven years ago. He now owns a pita plant, a bakery, and they sell through Dierbergs and a couple of other networks. This is Chan bakery. Buy it the next time you're at the store. He's now producing about five thousand packages a week.

Here we have our urban garden, a program which is now in the Midtown medical area. Some of our clients actually sell through CSA programs and markets, and others just raise agricultural items that are indigenous to their own cultures that they want to be able to serve on their own tables.

One of the things we do is help people get their US citizenship. There are huge barriers to being able to do it. If you're lucky enough to be on the citizenship path after 5 years you can apply for US citizenship. The application process costs you about \$1000 per person, and everyone over the age of 14 has to apply on their own. So you can see some of these families, it's hugely expensive to be able to do. But there are all sorts of studies about how if people, particularly adults, achieve US citizenship, how much more engaged they are in the community but also then how much more money they earn on an hourly basis.

Festival of Nations. I would love this event even if I didn't direct the International Institute. It's a lot about the food, but it's also about coming together in a culture where you're not afraid, where you can learn with a wide-eyed sense of wonder and meet people who you might not otherwise have an opportunity to in the community.

This is an *iftar* dinner that we did last May in collaboration with the Turkish-American community here in St. Louis. They made the food and brought it to the International Institute in the gym, and we had about 220 people there who were able to learn about Ramadan and *iftar* as part of a wonderful opportunity of breaking bread together.

But we also are very much aware that we have to reach out into the community and offer opportunities for people to learn, to develop knowledge about a lot of subjects they've been hearing about on the news, but in fragments. And you can't always put fragments together to know what the real issues are. So, for instance, in 2018, we offered among other offerings in our Bagels and Coffee series, we offered a program on DACA and one on the crisis at the southern border, and in December one about the migrant caravans, so people could understand what the factors were driving the development over and over again of these migrant caravans. If you're interested, you can give me your email and I can add you to the email list so you can get follow-up information about any of these offerings, should you want to be involved. Then in December, we've been doing an annual Jewish-Muslim day of service, where the Jews and Muslims come together to do projects on that day. Here we have an event that was done last spring to commemorate the SS St. Louis, which was a boat that in 1938 was turned back from US shores with Jews on it.

I just talked really fast to get through this whole thing, but a couple tidbits here, and then I'll be certainly happy to turn it over to our other speakers. Since 1979, which is the modern-day beginning of refugee resettlement in St. Louis, the International Institute has sponsored 24,000 refugees into this community. That includes large groups of Vietnamese in the 1980s and Bosnians in the 1990s, into Somalis and Iraqis and Afghans and others today. And most recently, we're resettling Congolese as well. We've also helped to start or expand over 600 immigrant businesses in the community, and this is only a small microcosm of all the immigrant owned businesses in this city. But as you can see here, according to the regional chamber and their data crunchers, just the impact of those 600 businesses, the start up and expansion on them, has a positive economic impact on this region of \$180 million. It's not peanuts. These individuals have the drive and the skills to really contribute to the country if we can welcome them and help them transition in an effective and positive way.

On an annual basis, then, we work with more than 200 local organizations to further the mission of the Institute. The representatives who will be coming up in just a moment are among those individuals, but I also do want to say that the faith-based representation in terms of who works with the Institute is much broader than that. Particularly, that there are Evangelical Christian organizations who are quite actively involved with the Institute and various programs as well.

So at that point, I got all the way through my presentation, and I'm going to let Marie come back up.

Griffith:

Thank you so much, Anna. I want now to introduce our three panelists, who will talk about the work that their own religious communities are doing—Jewish, Catholic, and Muslim—in this area.

Maharat Rori Picker-Neiss serves as the executive director of the Jewish Community Relations Council of St. Louis, she was pictured in one of those slides up there. Prior to that she was director of programming, education, and community engagement at Bess-Abraham Congregation which is a modern Orthodox Jewish synagogue in university City. She is one of the first graduates of Yeshivat Maharat, a pioneering institution training Orthodox Jewish women to be spiritual leaders and halachich authorities. She previously served as acting executive director of Religions for Peace USA, program coordinator for the Jewish Orthodox feminist alliance, assistant director of interreligious affairs for the American Jewish Committee, and secretaria for the International Jewish Committee on interreligious consultations, the formal Jewish representative in international interreligious dialogue. Rori is the co-chair of the North American Interfaith Youth Network of Religions for Peace, and she is co-editor of *Interactive Faith: The Essential Interreligious Community Building Handbook*. She is married to Russel Neiss, a software engineer, and they have three children here in St. Louis.

Javier Orozco is a Catholic theologian, educator, and leader. He is the executive director of human dignity and intercultural affairs for the Archdiocese of St. Louis, meaning he is a member of the senior leadership team and serves as the ecumenical and interreligious officer for the archdiocese. He's a board member for Aquinas Institute of Theology, the White House Jesuit Retreat, Casa de Salud, and the Interfaith Partnership of Greater St. Louis. He's a representative member of the St. Louis Mosaic Project steering committee, the University of Missouri-St. Louis Hispanic Council, and the National Catholic Association of Directors for Hispanic Ministry. He also served for seven years as a member of the public policy committee of the Missouri Catholic Conference. He holds a BA and MA in theology, an STB and a PhD in theology. Javier completed a two-year Christian leadership initiative fellowship with the American Jewish Committee and the Shalom Hartmann Institute in Jerusalem. He and his wife Therese live in the Towergrove East neighborhood of the City of St. Louis. Welcome so much, Javier.

Imam Eldin Susa is the head imam of the St. Louis Islamic Center, a position he has held since 2015, which is when he came to the United States. He was born in the city of Visocco, Bosnia and Herzegovina. He is a graduate of Osman and Rizokik Madrasa in Mizoco, after which he continued his studies at the renowned Al-Azar University in Cairo, where he obtained a degree in history through the Arabic School of Language. Upon graduation, he returned to Bosnia and Herzegovina, and continued his education at the College of Islamic Studies in Sarajevo, where he graduated with a degree in theology. He was employed as a professor of Arabic language and literature at the United World College in Mosdar, as well as a professor of Islamic Studies at a high school in Gurat. Prior to his arrival in the United States, he also worked as an imam in Visograd, eastern Bosnia, working with former refugee populations that returned to their pre-war homes. He often appears at lectures at local churches and interfaith functions, and he and his wife Amina have three children. Welcome, Eldin, and welcome to all of you.

Rori Picker Neiss:

Thank you all for being here tonight. I want to talk for a few minutes about the Jewish community, and I think the unique role the Jewish community plays within this wider context. Throughout our history as a Jewish community, we have been kicked out of just about every country that we've ever lived in. That's a memory that we carry with us. For many of us in the Jewish community, it's not just a memory; it's a potential reality again. We go through the world knowing that we have been unwelcome; we've been unwelcome in this country, and we've been unwelcome in other countries. And the scariest part of being unwelcome in the country that you're in is not having another place to go. The idea that you can have the capacity to leave a country and yet have no place that would take you in is possibly one of the most terrifying thoughts that we carry with us. It's hard enough to make it out of your country, but imagine having the resources and going through all of that trouble to actually get out, and then to be stuck. So, as a Jewish community, we live with the memory of the fact that we have been refugees in this country, we have been immigrants in this country. We know what that experience is like. And, we feel a responsibility for that. I often like to—I wish I could take credit for the quote, but I have to give credit to HIAS, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, which is one of the national resettlement agencies, the only national Jewish resettlement agency, and they like to say, “We used to resettle immigrants because they were Jewish; now we resettle immigrants because we're Jewish.” That's how we like to think about it also: that our obligation is not because the people who are coming to this country are Jewish, but because we as Jews know what that experience is like. At the same time, while we live with the memory of knowing what it's like not to be welcome, we also exist in this country with a certain amount of privilege. We're very aware of the fact that over time, we have largely been perceived of as white; that this country has, over time, shifted a lot of their discrimination to other groups, and “Jewish” is not nearly as terrible a thing as it used to be, we're seen oftentimes grouped with “Judeo-Christian.” And so we are able to access spaces that other groups can't access. So with that, we come straddling these lines, and thinking about what it means to have this story and to be able to enter into spaces where we can be in the conversation differently than others. So, as a Jewish community we have really felt ourselves required to be on the front lines of this work. Through the Jewish Community Relations Council we have formed the Jewish Coalition for New Americans, and our chair Stan Shaker is sitting in the audience. It is a coalition of not just our organization but all of the congregations within the region, other Jewish organizations, individuals who also feel called to do this work. Through that, I would say our largest project has been the summer camp in partnership with the International Institute. That was really a conversation where we were able to sit down with Anna and say, “We feel so helpless with the situation we see going on around us. What can we do? How can we contribute? What can we do to help?” And over brainstorming, it came up that there used to be this summer camp for children who, when school is out of session, still need someone to care for them when their parents are studying English or doing job training. The 90 day period that refugees have doesn't go on hold when children are on summer break. And we said, “We know how to do summer camps! We're pretty good at it!” This will be our third year in partnering, and being able to bring our Jewish volunteers—not just Jews, but organized through the Jewish community—to play with the kids, to expose them to St. Louis, to English, to all of the different cultural components of life here, and to free up their parents to really prepare for a successful life. We've had congregations

adopting families, collecting resources—as you’ve seen, the Day of Service where we come together. What’s so impactful in all of those is giving people their own stories to tell. It’s changed the narrative for our communities as people have met these families. When we talk about refugees now, we’re not just talking about our history; we’re talking about the family we just met with, or the kids we just played with, and we’re able to help carry their stories as well. We also do a significant amount of advocacy, not just as a Jewish community, but combined with other faith communities. We were meeting with many elected officials about family separation, advocating for legislation for DACA and improved paths to immigration. Also what you saw a picture of, working with our interfaith partners to do a commemoration for the MS St. Louis. What is so significant—this year, by the way, it’s going to be June 6th, the 80th anniversary coming up this year, we’re partnering also with the Missouri History Museum—what is so significant is this is a story of a passenger ship trying to escape Nazi Germany, exactly the story I started with. It’s a group of people who managed to collect the money to get on this ship—you can only imagine what that journey was like, feeling that they had finally escaped and were travelling to freedom, only to then land in Cuba and be denied entry, try to get off the coast of the United States to be told they would not be allowed to even land in Miami, to go up the coast to Canada, to be turned away there, and then what that journey must have been like knowing they were going back to Europe with no knowledge of what their future would hold. And of the people who were sent back to mainland Europe, more than half of them were then murdered in the Holocaust. So we get together, we bring our interfaith partners together, and we recite the names of all the people who were killed, we hold up their pictures, and we try to keep their memory alive. Both because of what was lost for them, and because we need to remember that when we close our borders, there are real lives at stake. People are dying. We feel that not only is that story significant for the Jewish community, but it’s become a point of shame in our American history. The mayor of St. Louis apologized a number of years ago; the prime minister of Canada apologized last year. We want to remind people that this isn’t only an embarrassment years later when we decide that a group of people isn’t as scary as we thought; this is an embarrassment now. When we turn people away from our borders now, that’s an embarrassment to all of us. As you heard in the presentation, it’s a loss to our community, and it’s a loss for all of the potential that we gain and all of the lives and what those lives will ultimately produce. We’re also just really proud as a community, because of those stories we carry, individuals, I don’t even know the numbers, but so many are volunteers at the Institute, they teach English classes, they support people, hire immigrants, hire refugees, really try to make sure we can change the narrative of this story. That because we know what our own history has been means we get to retell who we are as Americans for what that new story will be for the next group of people that chooses to come.

F. Javier Orozco:

Good evening everyone, and thank you Marie and your staff for inviting us. This is a very moving event personally, for me, but also, I think, for a lot of us here, so we thank you for the

opportunity. In the time we have—we have limited time—I do want to begin by a few frames enter the Catholic narrative on this issue of immigration. I think many of us who grew up Catholic were used to the idea that this narrative begins in one way with the Irish—you know, John Carrol, in the 1700s. But of course this idea continues today, at the Mexican Border in the US. So I'm mindful of how does one cover that whole narrative? But it's important to acknowledge that, that this is not a new narrative for the Catholic way of moving through, and the sensibility that the Catholics have had since the late 1700s. So I mention that to only keep in mind that we are covering centuries of Catholics trying to wrestle with this question of how do we welcome the immigrant, how do we welcome the person who feels and tastes different? So I mention that as an opening comment. I also mention this other comment: how do you think about the immigrant experience? How do we think about this topic of welcoming the immigrant? I think a lot of the work that the Catholic community has done both nationally and locally has to do with, at least minimally, working hard to increase the awareness, the understanding, and the actions that are to be part of their response as we try to welcome those who perhaps are perceived as different. And as I mentioned, for the Catholic community this is not a new narrative; as a matter of fact, the bishops have been very explicit in our own time, in the last twenty-five years, working very systematically to ensure that at least one part of the narrative that deals with the undocumented—the issues, the policies—that we support humane immigrant reform. That we deal directly with prudence, with intentionality, the broken system that separates families and denies due process. So again, this narrative from the Catholic perspective of being in the public square with clear intentionality has been there and will continue to be there.

I want to highlight another theoretical observation before I move into the practical dimension of our conversation, and that is because we've been dealing with this narrative for at least over 200 years, if not more, we've developed a language to understand this narrative ourselves as Catholics, and to enter that public square in a way that is meaningful to those interlocutors as we engage in this process of solidarity. So I'll mention some of them—they may be familiar for those of you who are Catholic in the audience, or some of you who have engaged Catholics in one way or another. Those are the guiding principles that have come out of our Catholic Social Teachings, which has its beginning systematically in 1898 or 1892. This idea that we can think through or be attentive to the narrative of the other—here I just mention some guiding principles that might be helpful. One is to think about this in terms of human dignity; so what are we talking about if we are not talking about human dignity? That's one thing to keep in mind. The second is, how do we agree on the common good? How do we engage this narrative in a way that highlights this commitment to the common good? The other one is this idea of subsidiarity; that any action we engage in has to always begin with the base, with a person, respecting and not usurping or taking the voice of those communities that have their own voice and will always have their own voice. And fourthly, solidarity—that somehow, we are all connected to one another.

I mention those theoretical comments only to engage now with the practical end of our conversation that we've been asked to share, which is, what has been done locally? How do we move through this in a practical way? Here I want to offer really quickly five dimensions or expressions of that action that has been part of our Catholic community, certainly here in St. Louis and in our region. First, is our commitment to intercultural competence. It was already mentioned—we are talking about engaging the particular story and journey of immigrants. So how do we create those conditions where we can really listen to that story and not come out with our own preconceived agendas on what they need or what we need to do for them. So I think this intercultural competence theme is very important for us, especially when we talk about the immigrant. We do not see them just as a statistic, because the immigrant—as Pope Francis reminds us over and over—the immigrant brother and sister, they have a name, a face, and a story. I think here, locally, we have worked very hard, and we will continue to do that in our parishes and our community using all the different resources. How do we engage ourselves interculturally? How do we create those spaces that tell our stories?

The second one is education. Helping individuals in the community learn more about their rights in the immigrant system, especially in relation to the Catholic social teachings. One of the things I often try to stress when I visit the Catholic communities here in our parishes in our archdiocese is that we are heirs to a rich tradition that already calls us. But how do we educate the average Catholic in the pew? When was the last time we heard a sermon preached on immigration? Those are the type of things that I think become important for our communities and become important for our Catholic narrative on the issue, especially to bring the light of faith into that unborn education that is to accompany many of us.

The third theme or expression that I would highlight for our conversation—it's already been mentioned, but I think it's important to say here—is the theme of advocacy. I think St. Louis and their Catholic community has been very consistent in advocating, certainly as a Catholic community, and those of us that are Catholic and are familiar with the way the Catholic Church and its structures work, we recognize that this advocacy is not disjointed, that there is a national way in which we continue to connect. And I just want to flag for all of us the work of the Justice for Immigrants, the Bishop's conference for the last 20+ years working for the Justice for Immigrants campaign. You can go the website and find all kinds of practical tools inviting the Catholic community to be proactive, to be engaged in the issue. The public policy committee of the Missouri Catholic Conference where I had the privilege to serve for seven years has been very intentional in looking at the local bills that come up, the legislature: how can we engage the local politicians in conversations that can lift up the stories? You may be familiar, some of you, with the archbishop's own commitment to this issue with the Peace and Justice Commission, when he established it here locally. So again, I raise those issues to remind us of some of the advocacy work that's being done.

Then, the direct legal services of the archdiocese's staff—I just want to lift up for all of us St. Francis community Services, the Catholic Legal Service—many of our brothers and sisters who need social services or legal services, these services are there to serve them.

Finally, I want to mention this, another theme is this idea of pastoral accompaniment. As you know, the archdiocese is very rich in terms of parish life; just to give you an idea of the diversity, we have 12 parishes in the archdiocese which serves the Hispanic community, we have the Vietnamese community parish, we also work with the Phillipinos, the Brazilian community, the Korean community. Again, how do we use our resources, and how are we consistently accompanying those communities? I mention those five areas as thematic for our conversation, but I think they reflect the deep commitment that the Catholic church in St. Louis has for this particular network.

Eldin Susa:

Bism-Allah, in the name of God. Good evening, again. *Salam alayku*, peace be to all of you. First, I want to thank you all for being here tonight, and to thank Washington University for organizing this event, and especially I want to thank Anna and the International Institute for all help they provide to those who are in need. Especially, since I'm Bosnians, all the help they've provided to the Bosnians. I think that although me and St. Louis have some issues—we have some problems, and we've already spoke about these problems—I can say that for me, as my perspective as a Bosnian, although I'm not a refugee—I came very recently, but what I know from Bosnians who came here as refugees is that they really found St. Louis to be a welcoming place. Even after the first regional refugees came here to St. Louis, many others who came to other places all over the United States moved to St. Louis, mostly because of the nature of St. Louis, because of St. Louis being a welcoming place. I know there are issues, but it really isn't all that black. At least when it comes to Bosnians, I think Anna would agree, it's one of the most positive examples of how St. Louis helped refugees and how refugees helped at least one part of St. Louis city and South County. And me being an imam, I also need to mention to remind us that we must not let fear—and you, St. Louis proved this, that there wasn't any fear towards Bosnians when you admitted them to St. Louis—we must not let that fear creep into our hearts and our minds now. It would be totally against our humanity, and it would be totally against our believers if we are believers—whether we are Muslims, or Catholics, or Jews—it would be against our beliefs to refuse those who are in need or fleeing persecution. Just imagine, to close your doors to one who is trying to escape persecution and you are closing your door and saying, “Go back to be persecuted.” Just to be honest with ourselves, we know what will happen to them if they go back. They are not fleeing because it is all honey and milk over there. They are basically fleeing killing, and they are trying to save their lives and those of their kids. That's something we need to be reminded of; this is the word we need to spread out, to those people who maybe forgot this. All of us, we are at some point, we were refugees—even prophets. We know Muhammad, peace be upon him, was a refugee himself, the same as Jesus, peace be upon him, the same as Abraham, the same as Joseph, the same as all of those we claim to follow. So if we are saying we are following them truly, then we cannot be the one who will say to those who seek refuge, to say to them no. We have examples we need to follow; for me, it's Muhammad, PBUH, it's also for me Jesus, PBUH, Moses, for some of you, it's Jesus, the main example you need to follow, and you know better than I do how he will behave towards people who seek refuge. We as a Muslim community are trying to have this in mind—we're really trying, although we are quite new to this place—Bosnians have been here, for example, for 20 years.

We have our own problems, we have our own issues; many Bosnians still didn't forget what happened back in Bosnia, still live under oppression of the old life, the new generation is probably adapting more to the American way of life. We have our own issues, the same as other Muslim communities which are relatively new in St. Louis, but we are trying in the amount of our abilities to help those who are seeking refuge and who come to St. Louis, newcomers to St. Louis. Maybe our experience as refugees is something they need, and we are trying to give them at least the help we received at the beginning. I know the International Institute is doing what they can do, but sometimes the help they can provide—not because of anything about them, but because of other factors and issues—isn't enough. Just imagine if you come to a place where you don't know the language, some of them don't even know the Latin letters you use here. For Bosnians it was also a new situation, and the International Institute helped them a lot, but their own communities also—for example, since many immigrants now are Muslims, we are trying to help not only them, since as Muslims we are obliged to help those who are seeking refuge no matter who they are and what they are and what religion they follow, but we will help them and we try to help them. Trying to help them, we have managed to put things, I think, right, and we are now providing for them assistance when it comes to not only furniture, but renting spaces or utility assistance, the same as we have helped them in food or clothing, or helping collect food and then distributing. There is something that is the pillar of Islam, and that's what we use to really help those who are in need, it's called *zakar*, it's one of the pillars of Islam, and it's basically charity that Muslims are obliged to give to those who are in need. And what every *masjid*, or place of worship here, is doing is that we collect these charities—whether it be *zakar* or *salakat*—and then distribute it to those who are in need. And it can be a really big amount at the end when you consider there are almost 18 *masjid* or places of worship now in St. Louis which are part of the imam council of Metropolitan Area of St. Louis. We still have something to work on; for example, sometimes we overlap with the International Institute, sometimes most of us focus on the same group of people, especially on those who are brave enough to ask for help, to go from place to place, and what I will need to work on in the future more is rather than to just provide help, to coordinate more between different Muslim places of worship, between different *masajid*, since Muslims in St. Louis are really diverse—from Bosnians, Middle Easterns, Arabs, Turks, Pakistani community, there is even a small but really vibrant African American community. It's not an easy task to coordinate all of these communities, but that's what we need to work on.

In addition, since I'm running out of time, I'll just mention some other activities we provide. The same as others, we are trying to connect newcomers, new refugees, with employers from our communities or people who can help them find jobs. We organize Saturday and Sunday classes for their kids. Sometimes we help people by visiting them; I must mention one of the Muslim organizations that does the best work here in St. Louis in recent years, it's House of Goods, it's volunteers—Brother Aadil, Brother Jamaal, Sister Leesa, and others—and they're doing a great job, and what they're doing is better than so many other organizations, including mine. They collect food, furniture, whatever is needed, and they take it to the refugees for free, totally for free. So it's basically the best help they can afford.

Thank you.

Marie Griffith:

Thank you all so much. I'm going to go ahead and open this up to the audience right away, and we've got a wonderfully large crowd. I'm so happy to see everyone here. If you could please be considerate of other people who want to ask a question when you're asking yours, and to be concise, and the panel should feel free to be concise in response as well.

Audience:

Anna mentioned otherness in the opening, and otherness can apply to each one of you panelists as well as African Americans. Perhaps you can comment on when I hear a white supremacist comment in my little conversational group, and I have a choice in either taking that person to task or letting it ride, but I don't think that's the responsible thing to do. Perhaps you've encountered those, and could you recommend a course of action?

Crosslin:

Oh gee, golly. I don't have an easy answer, but from my experience we are challenged to be able to provide facts at this point that, unless the other side is receptive to being willing to listen. And what a political operative said to me a few years ago, and it stuck in my mind, is that when you break down American society on practically any issue, you've got 20% that won't listen no matter what you have to say, you've got 20% that will listen and just want facts because they'll be positive about what you're going to say, and then you've got about 60% in between. It takes a quick assessment about where that person fits on that continuum. Because if they're part of that 20% on the bottom, there might be nothing you can do to change their mind, but if they're part of that 40-60% who are listening, you may be able to affect them. The issue in the end is that there are two things. I've heard this over and over again tonight, and I'll reiterate it: you have to make people real to other people. It's when they get to know people individually that they begin to see beyond. The second thing is that there's a whole discussion about shared values and behaviors. You'll never win an argument based on differences. If you think about the cultural iceberg, everything that shows above the iceberg is what's different—race and religion and culture and food, those are what you see the first time. Difference helps you understand the uniqueness of individuals, but to get to inclusion, you have to drill down and get to shared values and behaviors. What goes beyond those issues that may in fact be a commonality? Well, just about everyone loves family, they value family. So can you have a conversation, can you build something based on that? Well, everyone has an appreciation of the right to vote. You might not like how they vote, but everyone appreciates the right to vote. People want their children to be successful, they want an education for their children. So it's about beginning to identify issues at that point that can really touch those other people. But quite frankly, I don't even try to argue with a supremacist, because it's hopeless.

Orozco:

If I may just briefly mention from the Catholic perspective, I want to remind us that in January the bishop of the United States put out a pastoral letter on racism. In some ways it connects to the question of supremacy, when we think one is superior to the other. Responding to your question,

I think for me, the deeper question is how do we help one another to reconnect to that human dignity, and I think your question in terms of the comments—those are particular circumstances. In my limited experience, there are moments when I can provide a different perspective, not with the intent to change someone, but to say, “In my experience, this particular person or group of people is different.” I would just mention that. But I did want to put a plug in for the pastoral letter on racism that came from the bishops; not just for the Catholics, but to see how all of our communities are dealing with these issues.

Audience:

You know, the spigot is probably not going to be turned off forever, so what can we learn from the successful Bosnian immigration in the 90s so that when the spigot gets turned back on, we can get more than our fair share of new immigrants and how can these religious groups magnify what the International Institute is doing so we can work together, since resources are always limited?

Crosslin:

Well, the spigot is turned off from overseas, but one thing that I keep saying to local leaders is there are still plenty of refugees around the United States right now that haven't had a decent resettlement experience. We don't need to necessarily resettle individuals from overseas right now; what we need to do is identify individuals in other cities and see what we have to offer as an opportunity. So I think the strategy changes, but it doesn't necessarily mean that until such time as the spigot opens up again from overseas that we can't be helping other refugees and other immigrants. We just have to find the right attraction mechanism to find the people that would benefit from what we have to offer. That's the first thing. The issue of how do we attract more from overseas is a little more complicated, because we don't have control over the process—the federal government has control over the process. But we very much have control of the ability to help people who have freedom of internal movement in the United States to actually choose St. Louis, and that's quite frankly where I think we should be looking.

Susa:

When it comes to Bosnians, one thing I think is important in speaking about why Bosnians were successful in St. Louis—I think one of the main reasons for their success was that a huge number of them came to St. Louis. One of the things they liked about St. Louis is the huge Bosnian concentration, especially in South City, which started to feel like Little Bosnia. Sometimes first generations of refugees or immigrants, it's hard for them, for example, to connect to those who are immediately to adapt to American way of life. The next generation will eventually adapt to that way of life; sooner or later, it's something that must be. But those first steps at the beginning, the first generation, what I feel they need is their own kind, those who experienced the same thing they have experienced. And believe me, they have experienced the worst things that human beings can experience. And sometimes it's not up to them, it's up to those who are admitting them and hosting them to St. Louis. They cannot feel what they are feeling. So it's my experience for Bosnians that for some groups of refugees, it would be really beneficial if you concentrate them in big groups, so that you can see their impacts. In St. Louis, you can see the

impact of Bosnians in St. Louis because a huge number of them came to South St. Louis, they renovated houses, etc. But we cannot see the impacts of Syrian or Congolese refugees because there is a small number of them who come to St. Louis, and it's probably much harder for them to adapt to the society, to the American way of life, when they are just thrown into a new way of life. For the Bosnian experience, I think that's what it tells us. Sometimes I know that even Bosnians will say, "We are hard-working, we are this, we are this," for why they succeeded, but I don't believe that. I believe that if you give the same circumstances to others, then they will be successful, and they will do the same thing that Bosnians did in South St. Louis.

Crosslin:

Eldin, I just want to interject one thing there, though. We have to remember that in the case of the Bosnians, it was a unique situation. It was the last large group of refugees resettled in the United States prior to 9/11. After 9/11, refugee resettlement programming entirely changed by federal rules, and they started to resettle small pockets of individuals all over the United States as opposed to large scale groups, particularly of Muslims. So there was a very different change in a post-9/11 environment. The other thing I want to add about Bosnians is that their education level was very high commensurate to the U.S., and when they got over here they were able to really benefit from the last of the manufacturing work that was available still in St. Louis, and it gave them a step up in terms of getting settled here in a way that might not have been as beneficial in certain other cities. The group, therefore, that we should be most obviously looking at right now for the next wave of resettlement from other cities in the U.S., are something called special immigrant visa holders, and those are Iraqis and Afghans who actually were employed by NGOs and US Armed Forces in those two countries and have been pulled out in advance of our withdrawal. These are civil engineers, doctors who patched up our people in hospitals, pharmacists, interpreters, drivers, etc., and they're a high-skilled population. Things like refugee career path services become very important and attractive mechanisms for these people who may be driving cabs in Dearburg, Michigan. So there are strategies there in attracting that group that may be beneficial. But the idea of just being able to get big groups from overseas, it's a different world out there for resettlement right there in post-9/11.

Audience:

As I was listening to your presentations, I recognized two strands of effort. One is organized, systematic efforts to provide resources and services, and one is a consciousness-raising, motivating, mobilizing the faithful to connect individually. Obviously, distribution of resources and services is crucial; my experience coming to know refugee families is that just as important is the feeling of having family here, and that's something that an agency can't do, only an individual can do. So I'm curious, as someone who's always trying to light a fire among my own Latter-Day Saint faith community on this issue—we have our own collective memory of our refugee experience as well—where is my bandwidth best spent? Are there more religious agencies needed out there? Should we organize our own communities and efforts? Or is it better to motivate individuals to get involved in the agencies and programs that are already running, and being involved in that way?

Orozco:

In terms of the Catholic thinking, we always think in terms of both/and. It's important to say that in terms of the involvement with our Hispanic communities; as I've mentioned, we have 12 parishes. For us, looking at that population, how do we work with those Hispanic communities, make sure that they have the resources they need as a community to thrive. So the support as a community is important, and then to also motivate with them that together they can have a greater impact. How do we help those communities, how do we work with them and accompany them as communities, how do we look into the richness of their own expertise and put it into service. At the individual level, I mentioned earlier in my comments, I think that this particular conversation of the immigrant, I do think that it's important to talk about the individual part. I look at the individual Catholic in the pew and ask how comfortable are they in reaching out to the migrant and the refugee? I cannot assume they are, I cannot even assume they are comfortable with the Catholic teaching on the issue. So for me, that human person, that concrete person, is just as important as a community, so how can I reach that person and say to that person, "Here is what your faith asks of you. You may not be comfortable in a big group in the community doing a march or a rally, or something of a much more political nature, but can you offer your gifts and your talents and be present?" So for me as a Catholic, our thinking of the both/and strategy has served us well and I would like to continue that.

Picker Neiss:

I want to echo the both/and, and I think though it's also really important to be cognizant of not only the bandwidth of your faith community—and I'm going to overstep my bounds, to speak to the International Institute—I'm very conscious of the fact that for every project we do as a Jewish community for the International Institute, and we hope overwhelmingly is beneficial, it takes resources from the International Institute. So when we organize Jewish volunteers to run a summer camp, someone from the Institute needs to connect to the families, tell them what the summer camp is, explain to them that process, make sure that we know all of the different considerations of these individual families. So we are also somewhat of a strain. Now, right after the first travel ban was announced, the Jewish community overwhelmingly started calling the Institute saying, "How can we help?" I don't remember which way the phone call went, but somehow we got connected, and the Institute said, "We can't field a hundred phone calls from individuals," and we said, "Okay, we'll take our people, you tell us what we can do, and we'll handle our people." So on one hand there's a beauty of that face-to-face interaction, but on the other hand, that can also become its own strain. So, I would definitely encourage people to want to get involved as individuals, but to think about—when the Institute has its potlucks, that's a great entry point to meet people one-on-one that doesn't add an extra burden, or as Javier said, finding people in the churches. So what are existing programs where people can be mobilized as individuals that aren't then becoming more of a drain on what are already extremely limited resources.

Crosslin:

Let me just interject quickly also that I think it's great for groups to step forward to volunteer, but sometimes if they do unique projects together or take on one particular family or something like that, it's a challenge. Because if you take on one family, there may be five other families that don't have the same services, which is very difficult to explain to families out there who all feel that they have equal needs. But I also think there's a richness there when individuals from one group collaborate with individuals from other groups, because you're not just interacting with the refugees and immigrants and helping them, but you're learning about each other and your organizations and motivations and faith, and it becomes a richer process that way than when it does when you do things in a segregated matter. I think the people from the Jewish community who volunteer in our home visitor program where they work with people of different faiths, when the woman who coordinates it is Episcopal, that's an interesting experience for them to have a richer experience than if they did everything with people strictly from their faith.

Audience:

Thank you for coming to speak tonight. I suppose the last answer sort of touches on my question, but for the three panelists operating from different religious traditions, my question is what makes a faith-based approach better than a secular approach to refugees and immigrants? Do you feel that a faith-based approach is necessary for both of these questions?

Susa:

I'll start. It depends on the intentions. Sometimes the faith based approach can be harmful, I would say. It depends on what you want from refugees. If you want to convert them, if you want to change their beliefs or are attacking their beliefs, then that's the wrong way you are going. Both are, I think, useful; it doesn't matter from which point you act, as long as you help them. Just help them. Whether it's religiously motivated or not, just help those who are in need.

Orozco:

Again, I would say that I don't know that it makes it better, but I want to share a personal note in terms of the Catholic perspective. One, for example, is that in the US Catholic Church, many of us might not know that 40% of the US Catholic Church is Latino. So that says something to me about who we are as a Church. So for me, the question of me about the faith nuance or the faith expression of this commitment, one is that just from the faith perspective alone, there ought to be a connection. The immigrant narrative, it's our narrative as a faith community. The Catholics—Irish, Polish, German, Eastern European—they're all immigrants. We're not talking about them and us. So from a Catholic perspective, it doesn't make it better, but it makes it honest, true, and direct, so this connection I think is important. The second piece is taking ownership of our identity as an immigrant church, and to not forget as Catholics that that is who we have always been both sociologically from the immigrant experience, but theologically, we know in our Catholic theology that we are a pilgrim Church; we are journeying, we are ourselves migrants. This identity runs deep in our own spirituality and understanding. And thirdly, it's a matter of responding to our gospel faith and mandate. It is not an option. To be a Catholic is to be for embracing the immigrant and the migrant. This is not a question of choice; it's a question of

living out what Christ has already asked of us. So I would say that's the way a Catholic would begin to frame this.

Picker Neiss:

I don't think that the faith-based approach from the Jewish community makes the work that we do better; I think it makes us prouder to be Jewish. That is really crucial for us. What does it mean for the Jewish community to know that that's our identity and this is who we are.

Crosslin:

One of the things I want to clarify also about the International Institute; while we were founded by the Young Women's Christian Association, we are actually non-denominational, and work with all organizations whether they are faith-based or not, because as it's been so elegantly said here, we're really about providing the services. One of the few things that refugees can bring with them from their countries is their faith, and we don't believe that they have to give that up to be resettled into this country. We want to be able to work with organizations—faith and non-faith—that really recognize and value that the people want to retain their faith, but they appreciate the handout that they're being given at that point.

Audience:

A moment ago, Anna was mentioning what we share, what we have in common, and I couldn't help but notice that when Marie gave the introduction to each of you, if I heard correctly, every single one of you is a parent. That's certainly something that you all have in common, that you all share. Can you describe to us what the experience of the children is like and how the way that the children interact with each other improves and enhances the immigrant experience, and how those children can also interact better with the non-immigrant children in our communities to help our religion be better.

Picker-Neiss:

I have three children; my oldest is 7 ½, I have a 5 ½ year old, and I have a four year old. And there's sometimes just a beautiful simplicity; not overly simplistic, but to see through so much of the nonsense. I remember my oldest was five when we went to the International Institute Jewish and Muslim day of service. We had groups of kids, and we brought along games, and it was just to play with each other. Jenga, Connect Four, lots of games that don't really require language to be able to play, and he just had a phenomenal time. Then the travel ban was announced just a few months after, and the marches started at the airports, and we decided we were gonna take the kids to the airports to participate in the protests. So we went to lunch, and then we went home and started making signs, and one of my kids said, "What are we doing?" So I said, "Remember when you were playing with that young girl, and you were playing Jenga?" and he said, "Yes," and I said, "Well, she's from Syria, and some people think she shouldn't be allowed to come here." And he said, "Well, that's dumb! Why?" and I said, "Because they think she's scary." And he said, "Pssh! Let's go." There's an ability to connect that isn't all about—my kids understand that they have a faith, and they know that there are people of other faiths, and they also know that there are people who can be scary, who make them uncomfortable, but they can

tell the difference between people that they feel a discomfort with and someone that they're told to be different from. It's part of what's been beautiful about the summer camp also. There's just a way to cut through all of that overlay that we put on everybody to the core—this is just a person, as Anna was saying, they love their parents, they love to play, they love life, they love sports, whatever it is. It gets to the heart, and it reminds us of all the ways that we've crafted these narratives around us, and I love the ability—I think kids can do it to adults, also, to slide right through it. So whenever we have the chance to bring our children along, or to expose our community to other children, I see the results flourish so immediately.

Orozco:

I just want to take two seconds to say that my wife is in the audience, and we do not have any children. Confession time.

Susa:

I have three children. I think that children overcome all issues that refugees face—children will create their own cultures. They are adapting really fast.

Crosslin:

I think there are a couple of things that are inevitably happening, and we need to grasp them. Children really are our futures in many ways, but particularly around issues of race and culture, 48% of Generation Z are non-white, and 42/43% of millennials. There is a tectonic shift that's taking place right now in this country because of the growing diversity in the younger generation. And if we can figure out how to help these young people interact and learn not just about themselves and their own cultures, but about other cultures, and to do this when they're young enough before they learn to hate, then we can begin to make inroads in this God-awful environment we have right now where too many of us hate people or are afraid of people because they don't know any better. It starts with the kids, and we need to figure out how to harness change and to leave this world better than we came into it.

[end of lecture]