

***The Death of Josseline:
Immigration Stories
from the Arizona Borderlands***

by Margaret Regan (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010)

**Discussion Guide
for Unitarian Universalist Groups**

by Gail Forsyth-Vail

Gail Forsyth-Vail, adult programs director for the Unitarian Universalist Association's Ministries and Faith Development staff group, is a credentialed religious educator, master level, with an M.A. from Rivier College. Gail is the 2007 recipient of the Angus MacLean Award for Excellence in Religious Education, the author of the Tapestry of Faith Toolkit Book *Stories in Faith*, and a co-author of the Tapestry of Faith curriculum *Harvest the Power: Developing Lay Leadership*.

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Introduction

The Death of Josseline: Immigrant Stories from the Arizona Borderlands (Beacon Press, 2010), by veteran news reporter Margaret Regan, presents an interconnected mosaic of those intimately involved: immigrants, activists, human rights workers, and border patrol people. The book evokes a human and religious response, rather than a political debate, as it draws the reader into the physical, economic, and above all, personal terrain of immigration in the borderlands. Its heartbreaking yet hopeful pages invite witness and engage readers in the ethical, moral, and spiritual challenges presented by the complex issues on the Arizona-Sonora border.

The Death of Josseline begs for “processing” in a trusted community, as these stories are not easily held alone. Touching the soul and the heart as well as the mind, they call us to the religious act of bearing witness to brutality and despair, and extraordinary courage and commitment. We need a faith community to experience these stories together and to discern how we will respond and act.

This discussion guide offers two format options for congregational, cluster, or district programming for adults of all ages and life stages, youth, or adults and youth together: a single, 90-minute session which can be adapted to fill a one-hour or two-hour meeting, and a series of three, 90-minute sessions with a fourth, optional session for deeper reflection.

This guide includes a map of the Arizona/Sonora borderlands and resources for groups to follow up with additional study, witness, and action.

The Death of Josseline

Single-Session Discussion Guide

Time: 90 minutes (adaptations suggested for 60 minutes or two hours)

Materials

- Chalice, candle, and lighter or LED battery-operated candle
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Map of the Arizona-Sonora borderlands
- Optional: Computer or projector and surface for projection

Preparation

- Write these covenant points on newsprint, but do not post:
 - ✱ We agree to speak from our own experiences and perspectives.
 - ✱ We agree to listen respectfully to the experiences and perspectives of other people.
 - ✱ We agree to pay attention to the group process, making sure that everyone has opportunity to speak and to listen.
 - ✱ We agree to use this time as an opportunity for ethical, religious, and spiritual discernment, rather than as a time to debate politics or public policy.
- Copy the Arizona-Sonora borderlands map for all participants, or prepare to project the map.

Chalice Lighting/Opening Reading (3 minutes)

Light the chalice. Share these words, by the Reverend Mark L. Belletini:

For religion to be significant, it has to provide more than the comforts of community. It also has to provide opportunities for deepening, for ...spiritual growth, and for the casting down of false images of stereotypes, which hurts us all. A good religion has to open us to the real diversity of our modern world. For our work as liberal religious people is not to be competitive with others, and to find ways to supersede others, but rather to find ways to supersede ourselves, to grow beyond our limitations and our constrictive boundaries, each and every one of us. Diversity, you see, must not end up being some sort of feel good slogan, a word we keep in our back pocket to make us feel like we're broad minded. Diversity is a gift. But it cannot be a gift... unless it is received. It is only received when there are hands and hearts open enough to receive it. And the opening of fists into welcoming hands and welcoming hearts is our spiritual work.

Creating a Covenant (10 minutes)

Post the covenant points you have written on newsprint. Propose them as guidelines. Ask if any points need to be clarified, added, or amended. Note changes on newsprint. When the covenant is complete, invite participants to voice or signal agreement.

Introductions and First Impressions (15 minutes)

Tell the group you will invite each person to introduce themselves and, in a sentence or two, capture their emotional and spiritual "temperature" after reading the book. Allow silence for two or three minutes for people to find their words. Then, invite each person in turn to speak briefly uninterrupted.

Sharing (25 minutes)

Project or distribute maps of the borderlands area, inviting participants to refer to the map as needed during the session. Ask:

- Which stories from the book are most memorable to you? How did they touch you?

Invite participants to speak, one at a time, as they are moved. Ask the group not to respond to one another's comments until every person has had a chance to share.

Note: If the group is large, consider forming small groups for Sharing and Conversation.

Conversation (25 minutes)

Invite participants to respond to what others have shared. Remind them that the group has covenanted to speak from personal experience and perspectives, rather than challenging the validity of others' experiences and perspectives.

Discussion (10 minutes)

You may wish to post blank newsprint to record participants' contributions; you might ask a volunteer to note ideas while you facilitate discussion. Ask:

- What aspect of this situation most compels you, or us, to speak out or take other action? For example, racism? Economic want? Ignorance? Concerns about the health and safety of children and families caught up in the immigration crisis?
- What actions might we take, as a group or individually, in response to the book and the issues it raises?
- How might we bear witness to the lives of those most intimately involved in immigration on the borderlands?

Present a range of possible actions:

- Invite others to read *The Death of Josseline* and organize more discussion groups.
- Learn more about immigration issues from [UUA online resources](#) or [Beacon Press books](#).
- Write to legislators about the issues.
- Join the [alert list sent out by UUA](#) and organize local responses as suggested.
- Educate the congregation about immigration issues via newsletter articles, a worship service, or other means.

Closing (2 minutes)

Extinguish the chalice and share these words by Dr. Sharon D. Welch:

The wellspring of decency is loving this life in which people die, people suffer, there are limits, and we make mistakes. The wellspring, then, of moral action is not utopia, not a counterfactual vision, not a declaration that the world could and should be otherwise. Rather, it is a deep affirmation of the joy, richness, and blessing that the world is. The ground of challenging exploitation, injustice, and oppression is not a vision of how the world could be or will be in the future reign of God, or after the revolution. The ground of challenging injustice is gratitude, the heartfelt desire to honor the wonder of that which is; to cherish, to celebrate, to delight in the many gifts of life.

If you only have an hour... allow only five minutes for Creating a Covenant. Limit Introductions to 5 minutes and eliminate First Impressions. Allow 20 minutes for Sharing and 20 minutes for Conversation. Limit the Discussion about next steps to 5 minutes. Invite the group to re-gather at another time continue the conversation about next steps and/or provide a means for participants to continue the conversation online.

To adapt the discussion guide for a two-hour session... allow 30 minutes for Sharing and 45 minutes for Conversation. Allow 15 minutes for the Discussion about next steps. Invite the group to re-gather at another time continue the conversation about next steps and/or provide a means for participants to continue the conversation online.

The Death of Josseline

Discussion Guide:

Three Core Sessions and Optional Fourth

Time: 90 minutes for each session. Extend each session to two hours by allotting more time for Sharing, Conversation, and Discussion. The fourth (optional) session invites participants into further spiritual discernment and action in response to the stories told in the book. Note: If the group is large, consider forming small groups for Sharing and Conversation activities.

Materials

- Chalice, candle, and lighter or LED battery-operated candle (all sessions)
- Newsprint, markers, and tape (all sessions)
- Map of the Arizona-Sonora borderlands
- A copy of *Singing the Living Tradition*, the Unitarian Universalist Association hymnbook (Session 3)
- Optional: Computer or projector and surface for projection (all sessions)

Preparation

See preparation steps for each individual session.

Session 1

Preparation

- Read the Prologue, the Introduction, and Chapters 1 and 2 of *The Death of Josseline*.
- Write these covenant points on newsprint, but do not post:
 - * We agree to speak from our own experiences and perspectives.
 - * We agree to listen respectfully to the experiences and perspectives of other people.
 - * We agree to pay attention to the group process, making sure that everyone has opportunity to speak and to listen.
 - * We agree to use this time as an opportunity for ethical, religious, and spiritual discernment, rather than as a time to debate politics or public policy.
- Copy the Arizona-Sonora borderlands map for all participants, or prepare to project the map.

Chalice Lighting/Opening Reading (5 minutes)

Light the chalice and share these words by the Reverend Mark L. Belletini:

For religion to be significant, it has to provide more than the comforts of community. It also has to provide opportunities for deepening, for ...spiritual growth, and for the casting down of false images of stereotypes, which hurts us all. A good religion has to open us to the real diversity of our modern world. For our work as liberal religious people is not to be competitive with others, and to find ways to supersede others, but

rather to find ways to supersede ourselves, to grow beyond our limitations and our constrictive boundaries, each and every one of us. Diversity, you see, must not end up being some sort of feel good slogan, a word we keep in our back pocket to make us feel like we're broad minded. Diversity is a gift. But it cannot be a gift... unless it is received. It is only received when there are hands and hearts open enough to receive it. And the opening of fists into welcoming hands and welcoming hearts is our spiritual work.

Creating a Covenant (10 minutes)

Post the covenant points you have written on newsprint. Offer them as proposed guidelines. Ask if any points need to be clarified, added, or amended. Note changes on newsprint. When the covenant is complete, invite participants to voice or signal agreement.

Sharing (15 minutes)

Project or distribute maps of the borderlands for participants to refer to when needed during the session. Briefly summarize the content of the first reading selection, using these or similar words:

The Prologue of the book tells the story of 15-year-old Josseline Jamileth Hernández Quinteros' fatal journey to the Sonoran Desert. We are introduced to agencies and organizations, workers and activists involved in the search for and recovery of her body. The Introduction gives an overview of the reasons hundreds of thousands of people annually try to cross the Arizona desert on foot and describes political, governmental, and individual responses to that reality.

Chapter 1 relates the journey of cousins Ismael Vasquez Vasquez and Silverio Huinil Vail from a remote Guatemalan village to the Arizona-Sonora borderlands, a

journey resulting in Silverio's death and Ismael's voluntary surrender. It explores what life is like in Douglas, Arizona, a town directly on a pedestrian immigration route and takes us along to witness the work of Border Patrol Agent Edmundo Moncayo.

Chapter 2 visits the Mexican side of the border, relating the stories of Café Justo, a family-owned, fair trade coffee coöp with income that sustains 35 families, and a church that embraces a "border ministry."

Ask:

- Of all of the stories and people, which remain with you after the reading?

Invite participants to respond one at a time as they are moved, and not to discuss until everyone has had a chance to share.

Sharing (20 minutes)

Remind the group that, in the book, Margaret Regan shares the immigration story of her great-grandparents, who came from Ireland. Invite participants to share an immigration, migration, or economic displacement story told in their own family. Ask:

- What injustices are present in your family story? What risks? What unexpected outcomes?
- If you cannot recall such a story, what conclusions and feelings can you share about that?

Invite participants to respond one at a time as they are moved, and not to discuss until everyone has had a chance to share.

Conversation (15 minutes)

Invite participants to respond to what others have shared. Remind them that the group has covenanted to speak from personal experience and perspectives, rather than challenging the validity of others' experiences and perspectives.

Be ready to sit with a few moments of silence, to allow enough time for people to respond to the shared stories. If conversation lags, you might ask:

- What are the connections between our immigration, migration, and displacement stories and the ones in the book?

Discussion (15 minutes)

Ask:

- What from the stories told in the book gives you hope or inspires you? Why?

Closing (10 minutes)

Share this reading from *The Death of Josseline*:

I couldn't help but connect the plight of these migrants to my own family history. My father had died the year before, and for Saint Patrick's Day 2000 I wrote a lengthy piece for the Weekly on his life and family. His Irish grandparents, Timothy O'Regan and Mary Comey, had fled rural Ireland for Philadelphia in 1872. They made an arduous voyage across the Atlantic, only to watch two of their small children die, before dying themselves, in extreme poverty, in a strange city, at the ages of thirty-six and thirty-four. My orphaned grandfather, Jeremiah T. Regan, was left to raise himself on the streets...

...when I met the Guatemalan man whose young cousin, Silverio, had just died in

his arms, I thought of my great-grandparents' deaths in a foreign land. When I glimpsed a lone migrant purposefully trekking north through the desert, I was reminded of their determination. And when I saw brown-skinned women and children behind bars, I remembered the discrimination the Irish and other earlier immigrants suffered when they arrived in America. The stories of these new dispossessed foreigners may have been different in the details from my great-grandparents', but they were the same in all the ways that matter.

Like my forebears, these Mexicans and Central Americans had given up their homes to go where the work was. They were doing whatever they could to keep their children alive... My great-grandparents' journey ultimately was as much a failure as Josseline's and Silverio's, but it had a saving grace. They had two children who survived them, and their own suffering gave way to a better life for their children's children and beyond.

Invite participants into a moment of silence. Say, in your own words:

Let us have a moment of silence to honor those of all times and all generations who undertake perilous journeys in search of a better life.

After a minute, extinguish the chalice.

Session 2

Preparation

- Read Chapters 3, 4, and 5 of *The Death of Josseline*.
- Post the covenant points the group affirmed in the previous session.
- Prepare copies of the Arizona-Sonora borderlands map, or prepare to project the map.

Chalice Lighting/Opening Reading (5 minutes)

Light the chalice and share these words by the Reverend Laurel S. Sheridan:

Take from life its coals, not its ashes.

Fan the flames of love and justice;

join hands and hearts in common endeavor;

and there will be no limit

to what we can achieve together.

Welcome participants and invite them to go around the circle and share their names.

Introduction (10 minutes)

Review the covenant the group made in the first session.

Project or distribute maps of the borderlands area and encourage participants to refer to the map during the session.

Briefly summarize the content of the reading selection with these or similar words:

In Chapter 3, we read about a town in Sonora with cheap hotels and shops that cater to migrants and we hear about the patchwork of volunteers and Mexican

government services that feed and shelter those who need help.

Chapter 4 introduces the rough terrain and fragile ecosystem of the Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge, now crisscrossed with migrant trails. We read of the rescue of Marta, thanks to the migrant family who turned themselves in to seek help for her and to the effort and expertise of BORSTAR agents.

In Chapter 5, we read about the work of No More Deaths activists and others, including author Byrd Baylor, who provide water and humanitarian aid to migrants in the desert.

Chapter 6 depicts the twin towns of Nogales and how each has been affected by the border wall between them. We meet Mike, a Border Patrol agent who tracks and arrests undocumented migrants.

Sharing (20 minutes)

Ask:

- How is this book changing your picture of the immigration issues?
- What have you discovered that you never before considered or knew about?

Invite participants to respond one at a time as they are moved, and not to discuss until every person has had a chance to share.

Conversation (20 minutes)

Invite participants to respond to what others have shared. Remind them that the group has covenanted to speak from personal experience and perspectives, rather than challenging the validity of others' experiences and perspectives. Allow a few moments of silence for participants to gather their responses.

If conversation lags, you might ask:

- How do the on-the-ground pictures from people in towns on the Mexican side of the border and from humanitarian activists add texture to the immigration reporting we usually can get from news media?

Discussion (30 minutes)

Lead a discussion, using these questions as a guide:

- What roles do religious faith or spiritual values play in people's humanitarian work in the borderlands?
- What religious values do you hold in common with those workers?
- What values do you hold that are in conflict with those of the humanitarian workers?
- What values do you hold in common with the border patrol workers or town residents who are anti-immigration?
- How might your values call you to action in our community?

Closing (5 minutes)

Share this passage from *The Death of Josseline*:

The young woman [Marta] spent the night huddled up on a low hill overlooking a wash, in agony from the pain in her leg. She was terrified. She thought she was going to die in this strange, dangerous country, as her husband had before her. With two parents lost to the desert, her little boys would be orphans.

"It was so cold," she remembered. At least she had water—no thanks to the smuggler. She'd carried the water in herself.

Her luck changed with the sunrise. Early in the morning, a small band of Mexican migrants happened to come along the same trail. They were an extended family group from the village of Tecozautla, in the mountainous central Mexican state of Hidalgo. Among them were Maria and Isaac Cruz Olguín, a young married couple, and their two-and-a-half year-old son, Isaiah; the little boy's young uncle; and their cousin Raúl Cruz Uribe, a curly haired young man with a genial smile.

The Cruz family was shocked to find the injured woman stranded on the trail. Curled up on the ground, her misshapen leg thrust out among the weeds, Marta told them what had happened. The Cruzes talked the matter over. They were already worried about little Isaiah, his uncle would later explain. The boy seemed to think he was on some kind of adventure, but the trip had already been long, hard, and hot. Back home, in the Hidalgo highlands, temperatures rarely hit eighty degrees, even in summer. They had never experienced anything like this Sonoran Desert heat. The Cruzes decided to go for help. Raúl would stay behind to care for Marta while the others went to find the Border Patrol. The family knew full well that helping this Honduran stranger would cost them their own hopes of slipping undetected into America.

“What could we do?” Raúl Cruz Uribe would ask later. “We had to save her life.”

Pause briefly after the reading, and then extinguish the chalice.

Session 3

Preparation

- Read Chapters 7, 8, 9, and 10 of *The Death of Josseline*.
- Decide whether the group will meet for a fourth session. If it will, be ready to tell participants the date, time, and place.
- Post the covenant points the group affirmed in the first session.
- Prepare copies of the Arizona-Sonora borderlands map, or prepare to project the map.

Chalice Lighting/Opening Reading (5 minutes)

Light the chalice and share Reading 567 from *Singing the Living Tradition*, “To Be of Use” by Marge Piercy.

Welcome participants and invite them to go around the circle and share their names.

Introduction (10 minutes)

Review the covenant the group made in the first session.

Project or distribute maps of the borderlands area and encourage participants to refer to the map during the session.

Briefly summarize the content of the reading selection with these or similar words:

Chapter 7 offers the story of Mike Wilson, a member of the Tohono O’odham Nation who leaves water out for migrants in spite of a tribal council decision not to allow this on the reservation.

Chapter 8 features stories of scientists—a geologist who uses his field knowledge

and skills to create maps of migrant routes for humanitarian aid workers, and a county medical examiner and a forensic anthropologist who work hard to identify remains and return them to families.

Chapter 9 introduces us to people who live in southeastern Arizona abutting the border. Among them are Ellen Logue and Bill Odle, who hate the border wall because it destroys wildlife and their beautiful vista and Glenn Spencer, founder of the vigilante group American Border Patrol, who sees the wall as one means of protecting Arizona from an “invasion” of undocumented immigrants.

Chapter 10 highlights the human side of immigration raids, imprisonment, and deportations by telling the story of the Panda Express Eleven.

Discussion (15 minutes)

Lead a discussion using these questions as a guide:

- What are the fears and concerns of Tohono O’odham people? Of the ranchers? How are they similar? How do they differ?
- Is there a difference between those who have engaged as volunteer humanitarians and those who have brought humanitarian impulses and actions to the tasks that are part of their employment?
- What about people living in the Arizona-Sonora borderlands who are less directly involved in the immigration crisis? How did Regan find they are responding?

Sharing (25 minutes)

Use these questions if you intend to offer a fourth session:

- How have you brought your humanitarian and religious values to life through your employment or volunteer work?
- What parallels do you see between your own life experiences, both as a volunteer and an employee, and the ways in which the people portrayed in the book have responded to the situation that presents itself in their communities?

Use these questions if this third session is your final session:

- What stories in the book inspire you or give you hope?
- What stories call you to action?

Invite participants to respond one at a time as they are moved and not to discuss until every person has had a chance to share.

Conversation (15 minutes)

Invite participants to respond to what others have shared. Remind them that the group has covenanted to speak from personal experience and perspectives, rather than challenging the validity of each other's experiences and perspectives.

Discussion (15 minutes)

Ask: What actions might this group- or individuals in this group- take in response to the book and the issues? How might we bear witness to the lives of those most intimately involved in immigration on the borderlands? Present a range of possible actions:

- Invite others to read the book and organizing more discussion groups

- Learn more about immigration issues from UUA on-line resources or Beacon books
- Write to legislators about the issues
- Join the alert list sent out by UUA and organize local responses as suggested
- Educate the congregation about immigration issues via newsletter articles, a worship service, or other means

Closing (5 minutes)

Share these words, by Dr. Sharon D. Welch:

The wellspring of decency is loving this life in which people die, people suffer, there are limits, and we make mistakes. The wellspring, then, of moral action is not utopia, not a counterfactual vision, not a declaration that the world could and should be otherwise. Rather, it is a deep affirmation of the joy, richness, and blessing that the world is. The ground of challenging exploitation, injustice, and oppression is not a vision of how the world could be or will be in the future reign of God, or after the revolution. The ground of challenging injustice is gratitude, the heartfelt desire to honor the wonder of that which is; to cherish, to celebrate, to delight in the many gifts of life.

Pause briefly after the reading, and then extinguish the chalice.

Session 4

Preparation

- Read the Epilogue to *The Death of Josseline*.
- Post the covenant points the group affirmed in the first session.
- Prepare copies of the Arizona-Sonora borderlands map, or prepare to project the map.

Chalice Lighting/Opening Reading (5 minutes)

Light the chalice and share this reading by the Reverend Victoria Safford, from *Walking Toward Morning: Meditations* (California: Dyeing Art Books, 2008).

You know, we do it every day. Every morning we go out blinking into the glare of our freedom, into the wilderness of our work and the world, making maps as we go, looking for signs that we're on the right path. And on some good days we walk right out of our oppressions, those things that press us down from the outside or (as often) from the inside; we shake off the shackles of fear, prejudice, timidity, closed-mindedness, selfishness, self righteousness, and claim our freedom outright, terrifying as it is our freedom to be human and humane.

Every morning, every day, we leave our houses, not knowing if it will be for the last time, and we decide what we'll take with us, what we'll carry: how much integrity, how much truth-telling, how much compassion (in case somebody along the way may need some), how much arrogance, how much anger, how much humor, how much willingness to change or be changed, to grow and to be grown. How much

faith and hope, how much love and gratitude. You pack these with your lunch and medications, your date book and your papers. Every day, we gather what we think we'll need, pick up what we love and all that we so far believe, put on our history, shoulder our experience and memory, take inventory of our blessings, and we start walking toward morning.

Welcome participants.

Introduction (10 minutes)

Review the covenant the group made in the first session.

Project or distribute maps of the borderlands area and encourage participants to refer to the map during the session.

Briefly summarize the content of the reading selection with these or similar words:

The book begins with a death, yet ends with a birth, telling the story of Lilian Escalante Abrego's rescue from the desert by the Border Patrol, her baby's birth in an Arizona hospital, and her detention as an undocumented immigrant. The book ends before we know the outcome of her story.

Discussion (15 minutes)

Lead a discussion, using these questions as a guide:

- Margaret Regan uses the two stories—Josseline's death and the birth of Jesús—as prologue and epilogue to the other narratives in the book. What do you think was the author's intent in bookending her narratives this way? Why did she begin with the death and end with the birth?
- What questions are raised by the birth of Lilian's baby, Jesús? How do the book's

other stories of immigrants, activists, and people living on both sides of the border help us to understand the complex issues swirling around the new, little baby?

- Why does the book end before telling us the outcome of Lilian's story?

Sharing (20 minutes)

Ask:

- What stories in the book inspire you or give you hope?
- What stories call you to action?

Invite participants to respond one at a time as they are moved, and not to discuss until every person has had a chance to share.

Conversation (10 minutes)

Invite participants to respond to what others have shared. Remind them that the group has covenanted to speak from personal experience and perspectives, rather than challenging the validity of others' experiences and perspectives.

Sharing (10 minutes)

Ask:

- What questions remain after your reading?

Invite participants to respond one at a time as they are moved, and not to discuss until every person has had a chance to share.

Conversation (15 minutes)

Invite participants to share final thoughts about the book. You might ask:

- What images will stay with you? How will those images shape or influence the way

you approach news related to immigration on the borderlands?

Closing (5 minutes)

Share these words, by the Reverend Dr. Michael Schuler:

Cherish your doubts, for doubt is the servant of truth.

Question your convictions, for beliefs too tightly held strangle the mind and its natural wisdom.

Suspect all certitudes, for the world whirls on—nothing abides.

Yet in our inner rooms full of doubt, inquiry and suspicion, let a corner be reserved for trust.

For without trust there is no space for communities to gather or for friendships to be forged.

Indeed, this is the small corner where we connect—and reconnect—with each other.

Thank participants, and extinguish the chalice.

Resources for Next Steps

Visit the [immigration resources page](#) on the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) website for timely information, resources, book and film suggestions, and links to advocacy organizations and networks.

Consider subscribing to [UUA online social justice news updates](#). When you subscribe online, you can specify an interest in immigration-related topics. You can also keep abreast of political developments and calls to action by signing up for updates about immigration issues from the UUA's [Standing on the Side of Love](#) public advocacy campaign.